

“THE SYNTHESIS OF ALL HERESIES” —100 YEARS ON

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The condemnation of Roman Catholic Modernism in 1907 was a traumatic event—in the dual sense that it reflected the traumatic impact of intellectual and political modernity on the Church, and in that it induced a climate of repressive reaction that affected Catholic scholarship for decades thereafter. The issues raised by the Modernists form an integral part of the trajectory of 20th-century theology.

To discover who people think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it, it is necessary to gain a working familiarity with the frames of meaning within which they enact their lives.

—Clifford Geertz¹

IN THE FALL OF 1907 Wilfrid Ward was worried. That September Rome had issued the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, which condemned Modernism as “the synthesis of all heresies.” The document had done some synthesizing of its own in order to present Modernism as a coherent system, exposing its philosophical roots and the extent of its reach into multiple areas of Catholic life and thought. What caused Ward no little anxiety was a perception that the encyclical had done its work all too well, casting its net so widely that it seemed to have enmeshed even John Henry Newman.² Friedrich von Hügel’s concerns were more catholic: rather than desiring

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¹ Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000) 16.

² Ward was doubly concerned over the encyclical—both as editor of the *Dublin Review* and as author of a biography of Newman still in process. On Ward’s reaction to *Pascendi* see Maisie Ward, *The Wilfrid Wards and the Transition*, vol. 2, *Insurrection Versus Resurrection* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937) chap. 14.

the exemption of this or that Catholic from the papal condemnation, for him “the only thing that could make *Pascendi* tolerable would be a real, and not merely nominal, demonstration of how the document was in fact compatible with the best and the oldest aspects of Christian life and thought.”³ George Tyrrell’s reaction was more aggressive. In the course of two articles in the *Times* he observed, “When the encyclical tries to show the modernist that he is no Catholic, it mostly succeeds in showing him that he is no scholastic—which he knew.”⁴ Tyrrell was content to see the net cast widely—the better to discredit the authorities who had woven it. (It was these two articles that got Tyrrell excommunicated.) Alfred Loisy responded to *Pascendi* with “a feeling of deepest depression,” which he communicated to Cardinal Merry del Val at the end of September 1907. Loisy went on to write that in the encyclical he found “not merely a solemn denunciation of opinions which, in essential respects, are not those of the persons to whom they are imputed, but also a personal defamation of them.”⁵ Of course, *Pascendi* found its expositors and defenders, but it is apparent from this mere sampling that the Vatican’s synthesis did not go uncontested. Moreover, a series of measures directed against theological innovators in the years following the condemnation in a climate of denunciation that came to be known as Integralism, together with the imposition of an oath against Modernism in 1910, indicates that authorities were more than willing to enforce the measures set out in the encyclical.

Hence contestation marks the Modernist period (basically coincident with “La Belle Époque, 1890–1914) and may appropriately serve as a guiding thread through what follows here. This element of contestation is evident in attempts during that period itself to frame the issues and craft appropriate responses. Although the terms under which Modernism was condemned constricted the limits under which Catholic scholars could work, “progressives” continued to grapple with some of the same problems, while taking care to distance themselves from solutions censured as “Modernist.” Thus, in the post-Modernist period Modernism and its legacy were far from settled. While “Modernism” remained a contagious stigma, the very diagnosis of the disease could vary, according to the frame of reference of the diagnostician. The third and final section of my article

³ Lawrence F. Barmann, *Baron Friedrich von Hügel and the Modernist Crisis in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972) 206.

⁴ Quoted in Nicolas Sagovsky, *‘On God’s Side’: A Life of George Tyrrell* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 224. Tyrrell’s articles appeared in the *Times*, September 30 and October 1, 1907.

⁵ Alfred Loisy, *Choses passées* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1913) 356; trans. Richard W. Boynton as *My Duel with the Vatican* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1924; repr., New York: Greenwood, 1968) 310.

moves from post-Modernism to postmodernism. If the nature of Roman Catholic Modernism was (and, to a degree, still is) contested, all the more so is that of postmodernism. “Many postmodernists would take a dim view of any attempt to ‘define’ the movement, as such a process, they would claim, is part of the modern agenda.”⁶ Nonetheless, postmodern perspectives have reframed many of the issues contested between advocates of intellectual and structural renewal at the time of the Modernist crisis and their neo-Scholastic critics. Some appreciation of the postmodern contestation of modernity is necessary for gaining perspective on Modernism and its condemnation 100 years on.

THE CONTESTED DEFINITION OF ROMAN CATHOLIC MODERNISM

For a time, titles assuming the form “The Politics of X” appeared trendy. Even if no longer quite so much in vogue, in Modernism’s case the titling would be appropriate. As Gabriel Daly has observed, “Defining Modernism is a political act, in that it commits one, if not to a position, at least to a perspective from which to launch one’s investigations.”⁷ Perspectives can be double-ended, in that they can be viewed from either direction. Thus the act of defining may provide perspective on the definers, reflexively positioning them. The Vatican perspective on Modernism was set forth—at length—in 1907, in the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*. There, Modernism emerges as an orchestrated movement, constituting an assault upon orthodoxy on many fronts. The Modernist appears now as philosopher, then as apologist, elsewhere as historian or critic, other times as reformer or as theologian. The encyclical gathers up these fragments and organizes them into a coherent system that their dispersive presentation conceals, thus revealing Modernism as “the synthesis of all heresies”—a step beyond the errors of Protestantism, teetering on the brink of atheism. With nothing less than the integrity of the Catholic faith at stake, the control measures called for in *Pascendi* are both elaborate and draconian. Conceived in a climate of fear experienced by defenders of orthodoxy, these countermeasures, augmented by a campaign of denunciation conducted by so-called “integralists,” succeeded in creating their own climate of fear that inhibited Catholic scholarly initiatives in a number of theological subdisciplines for decades.

The climate in which the condemnation was issued has been evoked by

⁶ Russell W. Howell and W. James Bradley, ed., *Mathematics in a Postmodern Age: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001) 17.

⁷ Gabriel Daly, O.S.A., “Theological and Philosophical Modernism,” in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context*, ed. Darrell Jodock, (New York: Cambridge University, 2000) 89.

Maude Petre. She knew well several of the figures identified with the Modernist movement and was herself subject to sanctions as a result of her own involvement. Writing nearly four decades after the issuance of *Pascendi*, she observed: "We must remember, in fairness to those who were not always fair, that the impact of historical criticism on the traditional teaching of the Church was terrifying; that it seemed a case of saving the very essence of the Christian faith from destruction. Not perhaps, since the startling revelation of Copernicanism, had the shock been greater."⁸

The challenges to traditional positions with regard to the Scriptures and to subsequent church history that were posed by historical criticism constituted an important, though hardly the sole, factor in shaping Roman reaction. The title of a study by Canon Bernard Gaudeau, editor of *La foi catholique*, indicates that not only was the substance of those challenges felt to be so dangerous, but in no small measure their source as well. In substance, the corrosive effects of Modernism were far reaching:

Indeed, the facts demonstrate that the doctrine of Modernism leads logically and fatally, not only to the destruction of the element specific to Catholicism, as opposed to Protestantism (dogmatic infallibility of the Church and of the Pope); not only the destruction of what may be called the generic element of Christianity itself (real divinity of Jesus Christ, biblical inspiration, miracle, and other supernatural realities admitted by primitive and orthodox Protestantism); but the facts demonstrate that the doctrine of Modernism leads logically and fatally to the destruction in humanity of the very conception of a real God, distinct from the world, personal and transcendent, that is, the very foundation of all religious belief, every religious idea, all religious meaning, of all religion.⁹

If the destructive potential of Modernism was extensive, its source was close at hand, as *Le péril intérieur de l'Église* indicated. The walls of the fortress had been breached; the enemy had infiltrated the very ranks of the clergy.¹⁰ A sense of betrayal pervades *Pascendi*, surfacing at intervals in its portrayal of the character and motivation of Modernists. Their views are called "a delirium," "insanity," and "audacious sacrilege." Modernism is a "monstrosity," and its proponents characterized as guilty of "pride and

⁸ M. D. Petre, *Alfred Loisy: His Religious Significance* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University, 1944) 112.

⁹ Bernard Gaudeau, *Le péril intérieur de l'Église: Études d'histoire théologique contemporaine* (Paris: Aux Bureaux de la "Foi catholique," 1914) 28. On Gaudeau see François Laplanche, "Gaudeau, Bernard," *Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine*, vol. 9, *Les sciences religieuses: Le XIXe siècle 1800-1914* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996) 267-68.

¹⁰ Already, several years prior to the issuance of *Pascendi*, the several titles of Julien Fontaine's books are indicative of the danger sensed: *Les infiltrations protestantes et le clergé français* (Paris: Victor Retaux, 1901); *Les infiltrations kantiennes et protestantes et le clergé français* (Paris: Victor Retaux, 1902); *Les infiltrations protestantes et l'exégèse du nouveau testament* (Paris: Victor Retaux, 1905).

obstinacy,” as having cast off all “sense of modesty,” as being the “most pernicious of all adversaries of the Church” because they “lay the axe to the root not the branches” while working from within.¹¹

It is apparent from the encyclical that this sense of betrayal is not motivated by purely intellectual concerns. The Vatican condemnation of Modernism may have been delayed by the events surrounding the separation of church and state in France in 1905. The separation forms part of the context of *Pascendi* and surfaces in the latter’s indictment of Modernist support for autonomy in the political realm isomorphic with advocacy for autonomy in the intellectual realm. On their principles, “The State must, therefore, be separated from the Church, and the Catholic from the citizen” (no. 24)—a position earlier condemned by Pius VI.

While the corrosive effects of historical criticism are not neglected by the encyclical, it finds the most intensely problematic aspects of Modernism to be philosophical. In some respects *Pascendi* appears to have been written with the Kantian-inspired corpus of the French liberal Protestant Auguste Sabatier¹² in mind, more than the exegetical labors of an Alfred Loisy,¹³ the historical work of a Louis Duchesne¹⁴ or Albert Houtin,¹⁵ or the reflections of the Bergsonian Édouard Le Roy¹⁶ on the nature of dogma. The

¹¹ All references to *Pascendi dominici gregis* are taken from Vincent A. Yzermans, ed., *All Things in Christ: Encyclicals and Selected Documents of Saint Pius X* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1954). The references to this work will be noted in my text by paragraph numbers in parentheses.

¹² Principally Sabatier’s *Esquisse d’une philosophie de la religion d’après la psychologie et l’histoire* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1897); Engl. trans., *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion Based on Psychology and History* (1902; repr., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957). On Sabatier see Bernard Reymond, *Auguste Sabatier et le procès théologique de l’autorité* (Lausanne: Éditions de l’Age d’Homme, 1976).

¹³ Alfred Loisy’s *L’Évangile et l’Église* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1902) may be said to have precipitated the Modernist “Crisis.” In 1903 this book, together with four others by Loisy, was censured by the Holy Office. Loisy incurred excommunication in 1908. In addition to his autobiographical *Choses passées* and his three-volume *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire religieuse de notre temps* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1930–1931), see Émile Goichot, *Alfred Loisy et ses amis* (Paris: Cerf, 2002).

¹⁴ On Duchesne see Brigitte Waché, *Monseigneur Louis Duchesne (1843–1922)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1992).

¹⁵ Prior to his gaining notoriety as historian of the biblical question with his *La question biblique chez les catholiques de France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1902) and *La question biblique au XXe siècle* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1906), Houtin had evoked controversy with his historical study, *La controverse de l’apostolicité des Églises de France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1903). Houtin’s autobiography, *Une vie de prêtre: Mon expérience 1867–1912* (Paris: F. Rieder, 1926) has been translated as *The Life of a Priest: My Own Experience 1867–1912*, trans. Winifred S. Whale (London: Watts, 1927).

¹⁶ Le Roy’s explosive article, “Qu’est-ce qu’un dogme?” appeared in *La Quin-*

foundational philosophical error to which Modernists had fallen prey is agnosticism. While Kant is not mentioned by name in the encyclical, it is his philosophy that is transparently in view. Commentators in the period following *Pascendi's* appearance would make the connection with Kant explicit, crediting the Kantian inspiration of Modernist historiography, exegesis, and treatment of such fundamental theological issues as revelation and faith for affinities with liberal Protestantism detected in the papal condemnation.¹⁷ The latter does not distinguish between a methodological atheism adopted by secular religious sciences and a metaphysical atheism. Modernists are enclosed within a philosophical phenomenalism, rendering both science and history atheistic in principle and not merely in practice: "God and all that is divine are utterly excluded" (no. 6). The negative principle of agnosticism finds its complement in a positive principle of vital immanence; the two provide for a naturalistic basis for the religious sense. This sense evolves, and with it evolve the symbolic expressions that derive from it—in short, a third principle of evolutionism that Modernists apply to dogmas. The pernicious results of this matrix of philosophical ideas strike far beyond Christianity: "Here we have an immense structure of sophisms which ruin and wreck all religion" (no. 12).

In moving from the Modernist as philosopher to the Modernist as historian, then as critic, *Pascendi* sought to clarify the close relationship between historical practice and philosophical theories. Despite the fact that some Modernists involved with historical studies "seem to be deeply anxious not to be taken for philosophers . . . yet the truth is that their history and their criticism are saturated with their philosophy, and that their historico-critical conclusions are the natural outcome of their philosophical principles" (no. 30). More specifically, the principles of agnosticism, vital immanence, and evolution are retrieved and connected with Modernist use of historical criticism. The conclusion: "The philosopher leads the way, the

zaine in 1905 (an English translation is included in Joseph Fitzer, ed. *Romance and the Rock: Nineteenth-Century Catholics on Faith and Reason* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989] 347–73). Le Roy later reprinted the article, together with critical responses and his reply in *Dogme et critique* (Paris: Bloud, 1907), which promptly found its way onto the Index. The controversy is treated in Guy Mansini, "What Is a Dogma?": *The Meaning and Truth of Dogma in Edouard Le Roy and His Scholastic Opponents* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1985).

¹⁷ To cite Gaudeau again: "we dared, as early as 1895, to affirm that history and exegesis were for the innovators but masks, and that the basis for their doctrine was the dissolving philosophy of relativism, Kantian in origin" (Gaudeau, *Le péril intérieur de l'Église* 14). The repetitive invoking of Kant by French commentators on *Pascendi* is noted in C. J. T. Talar, "The French Connection: The Church's 'Eldest Daughter' and the Condemnation of Modernism," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25 (2007) 55–69.

historian follows, and then in due order come the internal and textual critics” (no. 34).

At the time, orthodox expositors of the encyclical sought to translate the document into plainer language for clergy or laity likely to be puzzled by its technicalities; or, assuming a greater degree of sophistication on the part of readers, expositors sought to explicate and explore connections made in the long doctrinal section. Neither *Pascendi*'s characterization nor the elaborations of its defenders went uncontested, however. The imputation of a Modernist “system,” developed around a defined philosophical core, was strongly rejected by Modernists and their sympathizers.

The most extensive reply to *Pascendi* came from Italy, in the form of *Il programma dei modernisti*. Principally the work of Ernesto Buonaiuti,¹⁸ it challenged the encyclical's “assumption that there lies at the root of Modernism a certain philosophical system from which we deduce our critical methods, whether biblical or historical.”¹⁹ On the contrary, “So far from our philosophy directing our critical method, it is the critical method that has, of its own accord, forced us to a very tentative and uncertain formulation of various philosophical conclusions, or better still, to a clearer exposition of certain ways of thinking to which Catholic apologetic has never been wholly a stranger.” In the pages that followed, the *Programma*'s authors sought to make “evident” the “independence of our criticism in respect to our purely tentative philosophy.”²⁰ “Modernism” as a series of conclusions reached on the basis of critical study of texts, rather than a result of a theoretical apriorism held in common found support in a number of other replies to the Vatican condemnation, most notably in Loisy's *Simple réflexions*.²¹

In addition to distancing his use of historical criticism from the philosophical dependencies alleged by the encyclical, and his denouncing the reductive characterization of Modernist motivations it contained, Loisy objected to the overly systematic, indeed rather monolithic, portrait of Modernism that emerged from its pages. Here Loisy was on firmer ground than with his dismissal of philosophy as an important factor in directing his work (his efforts in the philosophy of religion were certainly important to him²²). Part of the complexity of Modernism stems from its assuming a

¹⁸ See Giacomo Losito, “Ernesto Buonaiuti and *Il programma dei modernisti*,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25 (2007) 71–96.

¹⁹ *The Programme of Modernism: A Reply to the Encyclical of Pius X, Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, trans. George Tyrrell (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908) 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 13.

²¹ Alfred Firmin Loisy, *Simple réflexions sur le décret du Saint-office “Lamentabili sane exitu” et sur l'encyclique “Pascendi dominici gregis”* (Ceffonds: Près Montier-en-Der [Haute-Marne] chez l'auteur, 1908).

²² This aspect of Loisy's work is brought out in Harvey Hill, *The Politics of*

variety of forms, according to regional circumstances. The ahistorical character of neo-Scholastic thought, with its tendency to neglect or even negate the influence of history and culture on the substance of religious truth, created in its Modernism something of a mirror image of its self-understanding. Differences among major Scholastic thinkers were held to be, by definition, on secondary matters; of greater importance was basic agreement on essentials. There were, however, real divergences among Modernists regarding how a rapprochement between church and age could be accomplished. While *Pascendi* devotes most of its attention to the intellectual dimensions of the crisis, it does show some awareness that structural reforms in both church and society are advocated as part of a broader movement for renewal of Catholicism. To consider for a moment this single facet of Modernism, what emerges is the great amount of diversity. As André Boland has rightly observed:

what is called practical, or social, or democratic, or sociological Modernism does not make its impact felt everywhere in the same way. In Germany the label does not fit the activities of the Katolikentage. . . . The U.S.A. presents a special case, but practices there give rise to Americanism. In Great Britain, the works of G. Tyrrell and of von Hügel are those of specialists whose influence, as that of Newman before them, makes itself felt only on Anglican circles and abroad. . . .

In Italy, the situation is different, in France also: here and there, one can properly speak of a social Modernism. . . . For some, social Modernism is the most important, the most innovating, the most "scandalous," imposing on Catholic consciousness "a ferment, a tension, the cause of a radical mutation, as pressing and unstoppable as an error on the origin of the Pentateuch or even of the fourth Gospel."²³

As Loisy, Boland, and others have affirmed, there are modernisms rather than a Modernism. To the extent that one begins with the encyclical's synthesis, there is a tendency to do less than justice to the diversity and corresponding complexity of Modernism. Also, given *Pascendi*'s stress on the intellectual errors of Modernists, adopting that document's perspective too closely can lead to a marginalization or even exclusion of social Modernism from consideration. Moreover the unremittingly negative portrayal of Modernist intentions represented in the papal condemnation has influenced subsequent, even more recent treatments of the crisis.²⁴ With time has come a stronger sense that *Pascendi* is not the starting point for de-

Modernism: Alfred Loisy and the Scientific Study of Religion (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2002).

²³ André Boland, *La crise moderniste hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980) 11–13.

²⁴ For examples of these tendencies in the historiography of Modernism, see C. J. T. Talar, "Crossing Boundaries: Interpreting Roman Catholic Modernism," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 17 (1999) 17–30.

fining Modernism but is itself part of the dynamic of its delineation. As a counterpart to the encyclical's "top-down" perspective, recent scholarship tends to take into account perspectives of Modernists themselves, as represented, for example, in their autobiographical writings, or in biographies written by knowledgeable contemporaries.²⁵ While such accounts cannot be accepted uncritically, they do have the merit of mitigating an overintellectualized, overly simplified, portrait of the Modernist movement.

Pascendi has also had an impact through the reactions it called forth. The tendency to counter the encyclical's stress on a pervasive philosophy that informs Modernist methods and conclusions with claims for the independence of those methods and conclusions from a unitary philosophy has introduced its own distortions. Modernism has been represented largely in terms of the intrusion of historical consciousness into a Catholicism little prepared to assimilate it, a clash between Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment mindsets carried on within Catholicism, generating an internal controversy rather peripheral to the broader cultural and intellectual currents of the time. While the impact of historical criticism on biblical studies, church history, and dogma has justly received great attention at the time of the crisis and since, it has done so to the relative neglect of philosophical issues integral to Modernism that serve to connect it to the intellectual currents of the time. In Stephen Schloesser's succinct summary:

There were many anxieties at stake here, but three especially emerge . . . : (a) the importance of human *experience*—that is, that human life ought somehow to play a central role in our knowledge accounts of the world; (b) the problem of *reality*—following from the previous, acknowledging that interpreting reality via human experience and concepts entails the realization that such interpreted knowledge will be distorting; hence the problem of reality: a need to show that external reality is not unlike the mind that can know it; (c) the problem of determinism—following on a century of realism and naturalism (and especially Darwin), the felt sense that human beings are without free will, the capacity for choosing one possible future over another, and hence the impossibility of any real novelty in the world. . . .

What is significant about this starting point for a study of Roman Catholic Modernism? Put simply: Roman Catholic concerns were *catholic* concerns—human concerns, recurrent throughout the centuries, inflected in a particularly modernist/scientific language proper to the end of the nineteenth century.²⁶

²⁵ As instances of these approaches, see Lawrence Barmann and Harvey Hill, ed., *Personal Faith and Institutional Commitments: Roman Catholic Modernist and Anti-Modernist Autobiography* (Scranton, Pennsylvania: University of Scranton, 2002), and C. J. T. Talar, et al., ed., *By Those Who Knew Them: Modernists Left, Right, and Center* (Washington: Catholic University of America, forthcoming).

²⁶ Stephen Schloesser, S.J., private communication. David G. Schultenover, S.J., ed., *Pragmatism in France: The Reception of William James and the Rise of Roman Catholic Modernism, 1890–1914* (Washington: Catholic University of America, forthcoming) seeks to set Modernism on the footing suggested in Schloesser's

Even this expanded portrait of Modernism is not yet complete, lacking as it does the political dimension of the crisis. This facet of Modernism has not gone uncontested, with accounts of Modernism confining themselves to the intellectual problems and the controversies they generated, countered by analyses that surface factors internal to both intellectual and social reformist currents that constitute a more intimate joining of the two. From the second of these perspectives, at the basis of both scientific modernity and political modernity is the constitution of a public forum of discussion: "In accordance with evidently different modalities, both scientific modernity and political modernity are based on a new practice of discussion and formation of opinion *in and through* discussion. All that, which is founded on the freedom of personal judgment, represents a serious breach in the social systems based on authority."²⁷

While, even with the perspective afforded by the distance of a century, it still remains difficult to approach Modernism with a dispassionate objectivity and to find middle ground between its portrayal in *Pascendi* and the self-interested characterizations of its partisans, there have emerged at least the broad lines of what an adequate definition of the movement would have to look like.

THE CONTESTED AFTERMATH OF *PASCENDI*

It is possible to set along a continuum those involved in the larger movement for renewal that led to the condemnation of Modernism: Loisy at the center of a range of tendencies that included Pierre Batiffol, Marie-Joseph Lagrange, and Léonce de Grandmaison among the progressives on the right,²⁸ and Joseph Turmel, Félix Sartiaux, and Albert

comments. In his *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919–1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005) Schloesser depicts how a postwar generation of Catholics attempted to reconcile Catholicism with culture within the context of the *renouveau catholique*, and thus on terms rather different from those of the Modernists.

²⁷ Pierre Colin, *L'audace et le soupçon* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997) 79 (italian original).

²⁸ On Pierre Batiffol there is a short biographical study by one of his former students: Jean Rivière, *Monseigneur Batiffol (1861–1929)* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1929). Rivière also wrote *Le Modernisme dans l'Église* (Paris: Letouzey, 1929) to exonerate Batiffol from any taint of Modernism. Lagrange has been the subject of more substantial study. See Bernard Montagnes, *Le Père Lagrange (1855–1938): L'exégèse catholique dans la crise moderniste* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), trans. Benedict Viviano, O.P., as *The Story of Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange: Founder of Modern Catholic Bible Study* (New York: Paulist, 2006). Montagnes has expanded the original biography as *Marie-Joseph Lagrange: Une biographie critique* (Paris: Cerf, 2004). See also Jules Lebreton, *Le Père Léonce de Grandmaison* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1932).

Houtin²⁹ identified with rationalism on the left.³⁰ This sort of classification can work reasonably well as long as one restricts oneself to the intellectual dimensions of the crisis and remains focused on France. Expanding horizons to include social Modernism and an international cast of figures complicates matters rather quickly. To take but two instances: Romolo Murri in Italy and Hippolyte Gayraud in France were both liberal socially and politically, but were convinced Thomists. Gayraud was a critic, though not a particularly effective one, of Loisy's *L'Évangile et l'Église* and its successor volume, *Autour d'un petit livre* (1903),³¹ while Murri incurred suspension *a divinis* in 1907 and excommunication in 1909. François Laplanche's recent study of Catholic progressives over the period following Modernism's condemnation, though restricted to France and Belgium and largely confined to the field of biblical exegesis, deepens the sense of the difficulty with any neat categorization, even within a single region.³²

Nonetheless, despite their diversity, all these men had to come to terms with an ecclesiastical climate shaped by *Pascendi's* third section designed to detect and sanction Modernist errors identified in the initial, dogmatic portion. The interdiction of Modernist writings in print (no. 50), a regime of censorship intended to prevent publication of such materials in the first place (nos. 51, 52) that included the establishment of diocesan vigilance committees (no. 55), the necessity of a sound formation of seminarians and care in selecting candidates for Holy Orders, the restriction of clergy congresses (nos. 45, 46, 49, 54)—all measures coupled with a system of accountability in the form of triennial reports (no. 56). While giving “the impression that the early 20th century was a time of regrettable stag-

²⁹ Joseph Turmel's two-volume autobiography, *Comment j'ai donné conge aux dogmes* (Herblay: Éditions de l'Idée Libre, 1935) and *Comment l'Église romaine m'a donné conge* (Herblay: Éditions de l'Idée Libre, [1939]) has been republished as Joseph Turmel, *Autobiographie* (Rennes: La Libre Pensée Rennaise, 2003). Sartiaux has yet to find his biographer. See Pierre Riché, “Sartiaux, Félix,” *Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine* 9:607–8. For Houtin see note 15 above.

³⁰ Émile Poulat, ed., *Une oeuvre clandestine d'Henri Bremond* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1972) 21–22. Christoph Théobald has established an epistemological basis for Poulat's classification in his “L'Entrée de l'histoire dans l'univers religieux et théologique au moment de la ‘crise moderniste,’” in *La Crise contemporaine: Du modernisme à la crise des herméneutiques*, ed. Jean Greisch et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1973).

³¹ See C. J. T. Talar, *Metaphor and Modernist: The Polarization of Alfred Loisy and His Neo-Thomist Critics* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987) chap. 2.

³² François Laplanche, *La crise d'origine: La science catholique des Évangiles et l'histoire au XXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006).

nation in the Church's life" would be "at best misleading,"³³ it is undeniable that the readiness to use the sanctions mandated by the encyclical, reinforced by the efforts of Catholic integralists, had a markedly chilling effect on Catholic scholarship.

Integralism began as a tendency that assumed organizational form in the Sodalitium Pianum (the Sodality of Pius V), founded in 1909 by Monseigneur Umberto Benigni. Created for the purpose of defending papal directives, it carried out its activities mainly through clandestine operations via a federation of secret societies that included agents throughout Europe. Though its membership was never very numerous, it included several highly placed ecclesiastics, and enjoyed the support of others in sympathy with its antimodernist aims.³⁴

The secret organization that grew up under the façade of the Sodalitium Pianum carried out its campaign chiefly through the tactic of denunciation of an individual or an organization to ecclesiastical authorities.³⁵ In the course of the integralist reaction, as the definition of orthodoxy narrowed, the perception of what was considered Modernist correspondingly widened. Thus Modernism expanded from its primarily doctrinal referent to encompass "politico-social Modernism," "sociological Modernism," "literary" and "cultural" Modernism. Adversaries detected even "semi-Modernism" and affirmed that, although the organized, doctrinal Modernism had been vanquished by Pius X, there remained the Modernist state of mind, modernizers to be dealt with.³⁶ Hence the portrait of the Modernist painted in *Pascendi* grew increasingly blurred, the likeness applied to a variety of individuals, publications, and organizations.³⁷

³³ Thomas E. Woods, Jr., *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era* (New York: Columbia University, 2004) 10. Michael V. Gannon, also writing about American Catholicism, adopts a less positive view than that reflected in Woods's study; see Gannon, "Before and after Modernism: The Intellectual Isolation of the American Priest," in *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Historical Investigations*, ed. John Tracy Ellis (Collegeville, Minn.: St. John's University, 1971) 293–383. Barmann, in assessing the state of Catholic scholarship from a more international perspective in his *Baron Friedrich von Hügel*, concurs with Gannon's assessment in also using "stagnation" to characterize Catholic intellectual life in the period following the condemnation of Modernism.

³⁴ Benigni's career and prominent contacts are traced in Émile Poulat, *Catholicisme, démocratie, et socialisme* (Tournai: Casterman, 1977).

³⁵ Émile Poulat, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégrale: Un réseau secret international antimoderniste: La "Sapinière" (1909–1921)* (Tournai: Casterman, 1969).

³⁶ Rivière, *Le Modernisme dans l'Église* 513.

³⁷ "Once when a seminarian asked him if a certain French writer had been suspected of modernism, Ousanni replied that everybody that was not dead at that time was suspected of modernism." Gabriel Ousanni was appointed professor of Oriental history and biblical archeology at St. Joseph Seminary, Dunwoodie, N.Y., in 1904. Gannon, "Before and after Modernism" 347.

Benigni's organization was finally suppressed in 1921, but the climate it had helped to create lived on. Biblical exegesis continued to be a highly sensitive area, and Rome continued its surveillance of Lagrange, his disciples, and the École biblique throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. A regime of strict censorship prevailed, preventing several important biblical studies from seeing publication. While exegetes of the progressive school did not protest publicly, their correspondence and personal accounts make clear their firm and constant opposition to the official interpretation of the decrees of the Pontifical Biblical Commission as well as to the control culture of the Roman Church of their time.³⁸ Practitioners of other theological subdisciplines likewise had to exercise caution publicly, while chafing at times under Roman restrictions. *Divino afflante spiritu* (1943) eased matters somewhat for exegetes, but *Humani generis* (1950) cast theologians in the role of delegates and officials of the Church's magisterium.³⁹ On the eve of Vatican II, sanctions were still being leveled against Catholic exegetes, amid warnings of a renaissance of Modernism, and reflecting tendencies to minimize *Divino afflante spiritu* and emphasize *Humani generis*.⁴⁰ Jean Calvet sums up the personal dimension of the condemnation and its aftermath: "If you ever deal with the Modernist crisis, do not forget to tell how much we suffered."⁴¹

THE CONTESTED NATURE OF POSTMODERNISM

With the perspective afforded by somewhat more than a half century's interval, Thomas O'Dea reflected that "one gets the uneasy feeling that both sides thought they had the 'metalanguage' for handling the vast complex—Loisy in history, Pius in Scholastic theology, or even commonsense language. With such a complete failure to comprehend the complexity of knowing, it is little wonder that events assumed a tragic cast."⁴² Nearly another half century's interval since O'Dea's observation provides additional perspective on what he sees as being at stake here. First, then, what factors or elements in the complex phenomenon that is termed "modernity" separate the outlook of a Loisy from that of a Pius X—a Modernist from a Scholastic? Second, since we now speak of a "postmodernity," what

³⁸ Laplanche, *La crise d'origine* 304–11.

³⁹ "Linked with this is the notion, especially dear to Pius XII—as in the previous century, to Pius IX—that the theologian's highest task lies in proving the present teachings of the magisterium from the evidence of the ancient sources" (Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Shape of Catholic Theology* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1991] 253).

⁴⁰ Laplanche, *La crise d'origine* 460–61.

⁴¹ Quoted in Boland, *La crise moderniste hier et aujourd'hui* 90.

⁴² Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Catholic Crisis* (Boston: Beacon, 1968) 170.

factors have intervened to separate a post-Vatican II Catholicism from the Church of the Modernist period?

If indeed it is more correct to speak of “modernisms” in the plural, this is partly related to the necessity of speaking of “modernities.”⁴³ Nonetheless, it is possible to identify “the central concern of [modernity’s] originating moment” as “emancipation from late medievalism’s heavy reliance on the authority of tradition.” Its replacement: “the accountability of a shared intellectual inquiry.”⁴⁴ One of modernity’s salient characteristics is a sense of the historical distance—hence historical difference—separating the present from the past. Put negatively, the sense of continuity with the past had eroded,⁴⁵ to the point where the retrieval of the past by an observer far removed from those events both temporally and culturally became problematic, especially as critical studies questioned the authenticity of historical texts, their conditions of production, and the conditions necessary for obtaining verifiable knowledge of the past on the basis of such texts. The key to unlock multiple pasts was thought to be provided by historical critical method. “Historical criticism in the Enlightenment tradition relies on rational, scientific investigation to reveal the content of scripture. In its ideal form, this tradition believes that it is able to go beyond the reach of cultural presuppositions and philosophical commitments to establish the historical meaning of biblical texts once and for all.”⁴⁶ This opened a gap not only between biblical text and *fin-de-siècle* interpreter but also between earlier exegetes and modern biblical scholars. Authority was transferred from the former to the community of specialists able to proceed from the “assured results of criticism.”

This rather selective and somewhat abstract portrait is consistent with the apologia for Catholic Modernists presented in *Il programma dei mod-*

⁴³ As John Thornhill has observed, “The central problem of modernity begins to emerge as soon as we seek to define it. In fact, modernity has no firm self-understanding or confident self-definition. In its origins it was a movement of reaction against the cultural assumptions of medievalism” (John Thornhill, *Modernity: Christianity’s Estranged Child Reconstructed* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000] 4).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* vii.

⁴⁵ “If we think of the medieval paintings that show Abraham dressed in armor and Melchizedek dressed as a bishop, or if we read about David and his ‘knights’ in the fifteenth-century *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, we realize that people used to think of the past and the present as joined in close continuity. They did not imagine that life had been significantly different even fifteen hundred years before” (A. K. M. Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995] 2–3).

⁴⁶ Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995) 263.

ernisti—itself representative of a broader consensus among innovators.⁴⁷ Its constellation of commitments reflective of modernity placed Modernist biblical and historical scholarship in conflict with the theology dominant in Catholicism.

Another salient characteristic of modernity that proved contentious at the time of the Modernist crisis was a “turn to the subject”—modernity’s “awareness of and exploration of the subjective dimension of human experience.”⁴⁸ Its consequences for human knowing were explored more by the philosophically minded than by exegetes and historians. In 1896, for example, Maurice Blondel could write: “We are faced 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.”⁴⁹

The “profound transformation” in philosophy Blondel was referring to occurred with the philosophy of Kant and the attempts to come to terms with the problems he raised. Despite the efforts of Kant’s successors to resolve the problems he bequeathed, Blondel judged these unsuccessful. Essentially, the problem was viewed as coming to terms with the subjective side of human knowing without relinquishing objective truth. Neo-Thomism’s distrust of subjectivity informed its approach to apologetics and so blunted the force of its arguments, which prompted Blondel to state:

Since the thomist starts from principles which, for the most part, are disputed in our time; since he does not offer the means of restoring them by his method; since he presupposes a host of assertions which are just those which are nowadays called in question; since he cannot provide, in his system, for the new requirements of minds

⁴⁷ Prior to *Pascendi*, Loisy’s clearest exposition of his exegetical approach appeared in a chapter he added to later editions of *L’Évangile et l’Église* on the sources of the Gospels, and the first two sections of his *Autour d’un petit livre* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1903). In the latter volume Loisy reiterates the parallels between natural science and exegetical science (9–10, 35–36). Both deal with hypotheses subject to confirmation or disconfirmation by the data. In both cases the practitioner is an “impartial observer” (57). A scientific exegesis is therefore to be distinguished from “theological and pastoral exegesis” (50–51) by its autonomy, its independence from any theological a priori (49–50, 57). Exegetical science has its terrain, not to be confused with that of church doctrine (65).

⁴⁸ Thornhill, *Modernity* 121.

⁴⁹ Blondel’s “Lettre sur l’apologétique,” as it came to be called, originally appeared in *La Quinzaine*. Reprinted in *Les premiers écrits de Maurice Blondel II: Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d’apologétique (1896): Histoire et dogme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956) 53, trans. Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan as *Letter on Apologetics, and History and Dogma* (London: Harvill, 1964) 170.

which must be approached on their own ground, one must not tend to treat this triumphant exposition as the last word. . . . We must not exhaust ourselves refurbishing old arguments and presenting an *object* for acceptance while the *subject* is not disposed to listen.⁵⁰

In short, Blondel argued that the contemporary situation had produced difficulties that the traditional methods did not address; the classical authors had not envisioned the necessity of *preparing* minds to receive objective proofs. New times demanded new approaches. Blondel's strategy of beginning with modern thought was perceived in some Catholic quarters to represent a capitulation to modern thought, even if that was not Blondel's intention. The "Lettre" of 1896 unleashed a series of controversies that centered on Blondel, but were not limited to him or his work.⁵¹

Modernity's—and Modernism's—commitments to the historicity and subjectivity of thought came up against the speculative outlook, deductive method, and objective notion of religious truth embraced by neo-Thomism. This system has been described as a "supernatural rationalism"—supernatural in that it derived its data from supernatural revelation, not from autonomous reason; rationalist in its marginalization of experience as a valid theological category. Neo-Thomism has also been characterized as "positivist," in that its sources, scriptural texts, and magisterial documents were objective givens whose meaning required a minimum of interpretation on the part of the believer. By definition, the interpretive element was subjective, and therefore open to error. "The would-be believer . . . brought nothing of his own to the process beyond the tabula rasa so conveniently underwritten by Aristotelian epistemology."⁵² The objectivity of this system reduced the role of the historian to one of simple communicator of magisterial pronouncements.

From the preceding, it is possible to position the dominant theology, reflected in *Pascendi*, as regarding the retrieval of historical meaning as relatively unproblematic for the mind elevated by grace or even the sincere person of goodwill. The consciousness of the historical distance between historical text and present-day interpreter raised by modernity rendered historical meaning more difficult to access. Recourse to the critical methods of modern scholarship was necessary to gain a reliable interpretation of the historical text. This appreciation of historicity represents an advance

⁵⁰ Ibid. 28, 146 respectively (*italics original*).

⁵¹ See René Virgoulay, *Blondel et le modernisme: La philosophie de l'action et les sciences religieuses (1896–1914)* (Paris: Cerf, 1980). This brief treatment of the effects of historical consciousness on biblical studies and—by extension—church history, and of the concerns raised by Blondel capture both aspects of Modernism that were encapsulated in Schoessler's observation noted earlier.

⁵² Gabriel Daly, O.S.A., *Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 19–20.

over the largely ahistorical proceedings of neo-Thomism, in that the historical relativity of language and concepts must be taken into account, along with the originary context of a given text. This notion of “relative truth” made little sense to a neo-Thomist like Cardinal Louis Billot, who regarded this combination of words as essentially meaningless.⁵³ However, while the relativity of history was admitted in Modernist interpretation, in the main the relativity introduced by the context of the interpreter was not.⁵⁴ Indeed, this tendency was the case for 19th-century historicism more largely: “for much of the century the great thinkers of the nineteenth-century did not follow through on the most challenging of the implications of historicism,” manifesting “an almost inexplicable failure to apply the full impact of historicism to the situation of contemporary knowers.”⁵⁵ The “crisis of historicism” brings us to consideration of postmodernism, and the second of the questions raised at the outset of this section.

Any attempt to pin down postmodernism makes defining Modernism look comparatively easy. Since the very term “postmodernism” may suggest “a misleading sense of a school or theoretical movement,” Paul Lakeland prefers the term “postmodernity.”⁵⁶ Others are content with the “ism” but configure it differently. Broadly conceived, postmodernism may be configured by its opposition to Enlightenment norms championed by modernity. The site and degree of such opposition give rise to varieties of postmodernism, or, where a greater degree of commitment to modernity is retained, “radical modernism” (Charles Lemert⁵⁷) or “late modernism” (Lakeland). This diversity suggests that the postmodern condition may, for present purposes, be treated mainly through its effects, rather than by attempting to define its contours. A common thread running through accounts of postmodernism is a concern with the world in front of the text, or the horizon of the interpreter. This concern and some of its principal

⁵³ See T. Howland Sanks, *Authority in the Church: A Study in Changing Paradigms* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1974) where he quotes Billot as stating with regard to the notion of relative truth: “you are joining words without sense, making an empty noise, and you do not understand what you are saying” (116).

⁵⁴ Lucien Laberthonnière represents an interesting exception. Allied with Blondel and manifesting a strong interest in the Kantian legacy of philosophical problems, Daly finds him “breaking away from the historical positivism of his age in anticipation of a much later conception of hermeneutics” (Daly, *Transcendence and Immanence* 99).

⁵⁵ Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) 63–64.

⁵⁶ Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) xiii.

⁵⁷ Charles Lemert, *Postmodernism Is Not What You Think* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 40–43.

implications can be helpful in indicating where questions have changed and resources for addressing them have evolved.

In this regard Loisy may reveal something of the differences that obtained within the Modernist movement, broadly conceived, as well as limitations in their forms of posing and addressing the issues. Loisy has been judged more successful in revealing Lessing's "great ugly ditch" of history than in resolving the problems it raised. Nonetheless, his work does represent an advance over the progressives, who did not succeed in posing the hermeneutical question in viable form. Pierre Batiffol, representing progressives on the right more generally, hoped to distinguish in orthodoxy an essential, static element, and an element clarified by ecclesial reflection.⁵⁸ This distinction could not be identified a priori, but by applied research on the part of positive theology, a domesticated historical criticism, so to speak. While the second element has a history, the permanent element does not. Unlike Batiffol, for whom the practice of criticism would reveal an essential, permanent element in dogma distinguishable from the historical forms dogma had assumed, for Loisy the scientific work of the past had introduced a schism between the ancient religious universe and modern historical consciousness. The latter has the effect of dissolving the essential element rather than bringing it more clearly into focus. For Loisy, "The efforts of a healthy theology should be directed to a solution of the antinomy, presented by the unquestionable authority faith demands for dogma and the variability, the relativity, the critic cannot fail to perceive in the history of dogmas and dogmatic formulas."⁵⁹ This relativity reveals a distance between the horizon of the interpreter and that of the historical object. However, further advance in coming to terms with the problem would necessitate greater awareness of the relativity imposed by the horizon of the interpreter. "Loisy highlights the historical relativity and the finitude of the religious phenomenon. He veils those in the historian's own work."⁶⁰

In 1968, the same year in which O'Dea's book appeared, Edward Schillebeeckx published a series of lectures given the previous year. Earlier, at the time of the council, in an essay entitled "The Concept of 'Truth,'" he had acknowledged that "the Modernists did discover a real problem—that of the distinction between truth in itself and truth as a spiritual possession

⁵⁸ In addition to Rivière's biographical study, referenced earlier, see also Pierre Fernesse, *Témoins de la pensée catholique en France sous la IIIe république* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1940) 187–280.

⁵⁹ Loisy, *L'Évangile et l'Église* 163, trans. Christopher Home as *The Gospel and the Church* (London: Isbister, 1903) 215; repr., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976, translation slightly modified.

⁶⁰ Théobald, "L'Entrée de l'histoire" 42.

of man” but had failed to resolve it in a manner that preserved orthodoxy. In the remainder of the essay he surveyed attempts by the *Nouvelle théologie* and the Bultmannians to address the issues, acknowledging that the “problem that Modernism was unable to solve—that is, the problem of the relationship between experience and concept—has continued to be a theological issue until today.”⁶¹ In *God the Future of Man* (1968) the initial essay bore the title, “Toward a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics” and drew transparently on the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The sense of the inadequacy of the progressive distinction between “dogmatic essence” and historical mode of expression reappears with Schillebeeckx.⁶² The necessity of an “impartial observer,” however, does not show up: “What is thematically new in modern hermeneutics is our having come to realize that this openness [to the deviation of the text from the interpreter’s own views and expectations] is made possible not by our adopting a neutral attitude and putting aside our own background in brackets in an effort to exclude it, but only by doing the direct opposite—quite consciously admitting the light that we can throw on the text in question from our own contemporary situation.”⁶³ This entails an understanding of history that departs from the one that permeates the pages of *Il programma dei modernisti* and Loisy’s voluminous corpus of writings. “Historical objectivity is the truth of the past *in the light of the present* and not a reconstruction of the past in its unrepeatable factuality.”⁶⁴

Further reflection on the social situatedness of the present-day interpreter, as well as the successive interpreters that constitute a tradition, led Schillebeeckx to incorporate insights from critical theory into his theology of development. If the interpreter’s prejudgments are subject to interpellation by the texts of the tradition, those texts are themselves subject to question on the basis of possible ideological distortions the tradition may incorporate. This awareness, present in postmodern feminist and ideological biblical criticism,⁶⁵ is prominent in Schillebeeckx’s 1974 study, *The Understanding of Faith*. Applying critical theory to theological hermeneutics, he observes that it becomes possible to take into account not only “the breakdowns in historical communication between men from case to case,” but also to give “a central place in its investigations to the analysis of the significance and the compelling logic of such breakdowns. [Critical

⁶¹ E. Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, 2 vols., trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968; Dutch original 1964, rev. 1966) 2:13.

⁶² Edward Schillebeeckx, “Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics,” in *God, the Future of Man*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968) 1–49, at 10–13

⁶³ *Ibid.* 26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 24 (*italics original*).

⁶⁵ See Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* chap. 3.

theory] conducts a systematic analysis of the violent structural elements present in every social system.”⁶⁶

Schillebeeckx may also serve as diagnostician of a final aspect of post-modernism’s influence, given currency by the work of Thomas Kuhn,⁶⁷ that of discontinuity in the transmission of tradition:

We never look the Christian identity straight in the face; it can never be determined once and for all. . . . Consequently we cannot understand “the development of dogma” in the same way as the Scholastics or the Neo-Scholastics, or even in the same way as Newman, as the permanent explicitation of something which was always there implicitly, in a straight line from the Bible to the present day. The periodical kinks in the cultural understanding of reality rule out such a possibility.⁶⁸

Modernists were not unaware of discontinuities in the tradition. Loisy’s eschatological interpretation of Jesus and his message raised questions regarding the Church as the legitimate continuator of that message and mission. On the whole, however, the prominence given to an organic evolution by Loisy and others who emphasized this aspect of Newman’s *Essay on Development* tended to skirt the discontinuity between Jesus and the Gospel as Loisy understood both. In a post-Kuhnian context, it is appropriate to raise the question, “Does the organic metaphor underlying the expositions of development adequately explain historical change and discontinuity?”⁶⁹ The watershed event of Vatican II has made the question one of more than specialist interest.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1974) 130.

⁶⁷ See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970). For assessments of the utility of Kuhn’s analysis for understanding theology see Hans Küng and David Tracy, ed., *Paradigm Change in Theology*, trans. Margaret Köhl (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

⁶⁸ Quoted in John Bowden, *Edward Schillebeeckx: In Search of the Kingdom of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 138–39.

⁶⁹ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Catholic Nineteenth Century Theology: Selectivity and Interpretation,” *Papers of the Nineteenth-Century Theology Working Group of the American Academy of Religion* 11 (1985) 9. Further discussion of assessing continuity and identity in the tradition may be found in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984). See also John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 2000) for an appreciation of the complexity involved.

⁷⁰ In his *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist, 2004), Ormond Rush distinguishes between macro-ruptures and micro-ruptures as a way of handling continuities and discontinuities with the tradition in conciliar teaching: “Whatever of the micro-ruptures, whatever of the ‘innovations’ and ‘discontinuities’ that Vatican II introduced, the Council never intended a macro-rupture, never intended to sever itself from the great tradition; innovations and discontinuities (micro-ruptures) were seen to be ways of rejuvenating that

SIMPLIFIED CONCLUSION

After the multiple complexities of Modernism, modernity, and postmodernity, I conclude with some simplified observations. While it would be excessive to characterize neo-Thomist theologians as having the answers—to questions no one was asking—the statement is not pure caricature. Modernists had the courage to ask hard questions, posed, however, on modernity's terms and—often—on modernity's turf. It can fairly be said that, in imposing renewed commitment to Scholasticism as solution, *Pascendi* signally misdiagnosed the problem. It can also justly be said that Modernist assertions regarding the independence of critical methods from philosophical commitments cannot be sustained. If *Pascendi* manifests difficulty in adequately sorting out methodological from metaphysical commitments, it was right to see them as interconnected. It was also correct in seeing the kinds of philosophical issues raised by Schloesser as integral to Modernism.

Both *Pascendi* and Modernism have had to give ground on their understandings of science. If theology, understood as an Aristotelian science of faith, failed to resonate with Modernists, an understanding of science conceived on the hypothetico-deductive model of positivism has been challenged by more recent developments in hermeneutics. By extension, the respective approaches to history by both neo-Scholasticism and Modernism have had to be rethought.⁷¹ And the framers of the encyclical would have been shocked at the decline of neo-Thomism in the wake of Vatican II.⁷²

One may note a resurgence in the work of the Modernists around the time of Vatican II—no coincidence that. In a 1918 letter to Maude Petre, Friedrich von Hügel had distinguished “two, really (in substance) distinct, subject-matters which could be described under the term ‘Modernism’—especially if we mean Catholic ‘Modernism.’” In one sense “Modernism” referred to the historical movement for Catholic renewal condemned un-

broader tradition” (7). However, what is intended as theologically reformist may be, sociologically, revolutionary.

⁷¹ See for example Ernst Breisach, *On the Future of History. The Postmodernist Challenge and Its Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).

⁷² Nicholas Lobkowitz has suggested a number of factors to account for Thomism's decline. He observes that philosophies “do not disappear, or very rarely do so, because someone has succeeded in showing that they are false.” Rather, it is more a matter of the more recent one “casting our experience in terms of a conceptual framework that seems more natural to . . . contemporaries” and thus being “considered more relevant, to correspond more closely to the way we experience and interpret reality” (Nicholas Lobkowitz, “What Happened to Thomism?: From *Aeterni Patris* to *Vaticanum Secundum*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69 [1995] 414–15).

der that name in 1907. The other “Modernism” he described as “a permanent, never quite finished, always sooner or later, more or less, rebeginning set of attempts to express the old Faith and its permanent truths and helps—to interpret it according to what appears the best and the most abiding elements in the philosophy and scholarship of the later and latest times. Such work never ceases for long.”⁷³ While it was certainly possible to draw a distinction between the *fin de siècle* movement and later efforts to engage modernity, the question of the relation between the two naturally occurred at the time of the council. In the summer of 1965, prior to Vatican II’s fourth session, *Continuum* devoted an issue to Modernism seen refracted through some of its prominent representatives and the integralist reaction. Rosemary Ruether’s contribution, centering on the work of Alfred Loisy, differentiated between the earlier movement and the contemporary *aggiornamento* in terms of their respective focal concerns—the former concentrating on historical scholarship, the latter stressing liturgical renewal and ecumenism. She observed:

Keeping these differences in view, however, it is not inaccurate to say that *aggiornamento* is a movement in the Church in terms of the intellectual conditions of the sixties to do what Modernism tried to do in terms of the Catholicism of the turn of the century. It should not surprise us that the accusation of “Modernism” springs not infrequently to the lips of conservatives in the Vatican Council who would wish to block the progress of the new movement. Yet, in spite of the fact that *aggiornamento* arises out of the same need and is trying to do much of the same thing, no advocate of *aggiornamento* would dream of appealing to Modernism, any more than a Modernist would have dreamed of appealing to Döllinger, for the same reason. Any relation to Modernism, once condemned, is a liability. Consequently advocates of *aggiornamento* strive to exhibit discontinuity between their aims and ideals and those of Modernism and to disavow it in advance.⁷⁴

In the council’s wake that climate would change, and Catholic Modernism and Modernists would reappear in Catholic scholarship, in part, because they had asked some of the same questions that had emerged over the course of the council’s four sessions. Nonetheless, even where the questions themselves had changed (it was no longer a matter, for example, of asking what of history there is in the Bible; rather, how may the Bible be situated in history?) there were enduring underlying issues. One possible way to frame the problem that lies at the basis of the Modernist crisis is

⁷³ Von Hügel to Petre, 13 March 1918 [1919], in Friedrich von Hügel, *Selected Letters, 1896–1924*, ed. Bernard Holland, (London: J. M. Dent, 1926) 248; published in Friedrich von Hügel, *The Letters of Friedrich von Hügel and Maude D. Petre: The Modernist Movement in England*, ed. and intro. James J. Kelly, foreword Gabriel Daly (Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2003) 173.

⁷⁴ Rosemary Ruether, “Loisy: History and Commitment,” *Continuum* 3 (1965) 153–67, at 155.

“how to conceive the presence and exercise of a spiritual power in a pluralist society?”⁷⁵ And, by extension, how to shape a lived response to the application of that power by an ecclesiastical institution? Modernists found promising resources for thinking about both.

In its attempts to come to terms with modernity (von Hügel’s second sense of “Modernism”), Vatican II placed Catholicism in a post-Modernist (von Hügel’s first meaning of the term) mode. The dropping of the oath against Modernism, originally imposed in 1910, is symptomatic of the change. If efforts at renewal were to attract censure, they would have to be stigmatized on other grounds. However, as Rush points out, “Ironically, just as Roman Catholicism was receiving the elements of modernity judged to be consonant with the Gospel, Western society was entering the yet-to-be-named epoch of what is still vaguely called ‘post-modernity.’”⁷⁶ The frameworks for meaning have not stood still. Depending on what stance is taken toward “postmodernity,” the perspective on Modernism can be expected to vary.⁷⁷ If one accepts, for example, the account of the shifts in horizon from modernity to postmodernity suggested in the foregoing, the Modernists represent an advance in the trajectory of 20th-century theology, both within and beyond Catholicism. Still, one may ask, are they memorable in their own right, and not only as a way station to something else? Certainly they had the courage to ask the hard questions, even if they did not always possess resources to answer them adequately. That is worth remembering—and honoring. Moreover, they had the persistence to keep asking the questions and offering solutions, even in face of official indifference, discouragement, and growing hostility. They personalize the dilemma of the scholar (indeed, of the Catholic) who finds the conclusions

⁷⁵ Colin, *L’audace et le soupçon* 269.

⁷⁶ Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II* 20.

⁷⁷ Lakeland distinguishes among postmodernists (the committed), late modernists (the selectively committed, while still retaining important elements of modernity), and the nostalgic. The radical historicist perspective of a committed post-modernism would make it difficult for Christian theologians to enlist among its ranks. Late modernists would seek to retain commitments to reason and subjectivity, while recognizing that post-Enlightenment developments have enormously complicated their maintenance. The nostalgic response is one of resistance to post-modernity’s claims, exemplified in adherents of Radical Orthodoxy. As representative of the latter is Tracey Rowland’s assessment: “The conclusion of a number of contemporary scholars is that the response demanded but not met by the Modernist crisis, which included the question of the stance of the magisterium towards the Liberal tradition, but was much more complex and broader in its ambit than this, was the elaboration of a theology of culture.” In her estimation Vatican II fell short of providing such, because “the Conciliar fathers generally lacked a notion of modernity as a *specific cultural formation*” (Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* [New York: Routledge, 2003] 17, 21).

that emerge from experience at variance with the *dicta* of ecclesiastical authorities. When fidelity to one's own integrity and fidelity to one's religious tradition conflict, what is to be done? The figures who are remembered for their roles in the Modernist crisis do not present an algorithmic solution so much as a series of *exempla*, each with its own cost. If indeed, as Newman demonstrated in the *Apologia*, truth at times is better demonstrated through narrating a life than through "paper logic," then these lives are worth revisiting by those who seek their own integrity in the midst of a church still marked by contested frames of meaning.