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# Maurice Blondel: Precursor of the Second Vatican Council

Peter J. Bernardi S.J.

**Abstract:** *The ecclesial renewal promoted by the Second Vatican Council would not have been possible without the intrepid labors of Catholic theologians, philosophers, and pastors in the decades preceding the Council. Among these Catholic visionaries, the French Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) merits special recognition. He had a decisive impact on ressourcement theologians who helped to draft the conciliar documents. Blondel's influence is especially evident in their critique of conceptual rationalism that marked the pre-conciliar scholastic manuals, in the articulation of a richer understanding of the Church's tradition, and in the Council's teaching of a unitary human destiny. Blondel's thought contributed to the overcoming of a one-sided siege mentality with which the Church had responded to modern developments. Though Blondel was long suspect among certain scholastics, the Council implicitly vindicated key aspects of his "philosophy of action." Blondel is appropriately called "the philosopher of Vatican II."*

The 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) featured many conferences and publications that reminded us of the drama and achievements of this most momentous event in the modern history of the Catholic Church whose promise is still being realized. Among the intellectual heroes whose work significantly enabled the ecclesial renewal authorized by the Council was the French Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861-1949). Not without reason Blondel has been called "the philosopher of Vatican II."<sup>1</sup> There is an irony here because Blondel, like certain council participants who acknowledged his influence, was under a cloud of suspicion in the decades that preceded the council. This irony has been further heightened by William L. Portier who has recounted

1 See Peter Henrici, SJ, "Maurice Blondel, 'filosofo del Vaticano II': Ricordi e riflessioni filosofiche sull'evento del Concilio," *Gregorianum* 95 (2014), 23-38. See also Myles B. Hannan, "Maurice Blondel: The Philosopher of Vatican II," *Heythrop Journal* 56 (2015), 907-918.

the “vindication” and pronounced the “triumph” of Maurice Blondel.<sup>2</sup> This modest essay intends to highlight three aspects of Blondel’s influence on the documents of Vatican II including his critiques of conceptual rationalism and an overly rigid, intellectualist understanding of tradition, and, most importantly, his recovery of a unitary conception of human destiny. Overall, Blondel’s philosophy of action helped to renew the Church’s relationship with the modern world.

Midway through Vatican II’s deliberations, a slender volume appeared entitled *Attente du Concile* [“Awaiting the Council”].<sup>3</sup> It consisted of mostly undated jottings from a private journal that Blondel had kept decades before Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council. Among these *pensées* is this nugget:

A new area is opening for the Church, ever the same and ever growing. Instead of this mentality of the theological guillotine and of scholastic definition—and once dogmatic precision, unity and authority [are] surely obtained and maintained—there is room for an enlargement and encounter with modern aspirations which come from another point but under the same invisible breath of the Spirit that carries all to the same fold.<sup>4</sup>

Early in the twentieth century, when the anti-modernist repression was raging in the Church, Blondel anticipated Vatican II’s opening to the modern world, especially articulated in the council’s “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.” The ecclesial *aggiornamento* that Pope John XXIII expressed as a reason for convoking the council was indebted to the renewal of Catholic thought of which Maurice Blondel was a pre-eminent catalyst.<sup>5</sup>

Establishing Blondel’s influence on the teachings of Vatican II is largely an inferential undertaking.<sup>6</sup> An arcane reference to Blondel in the council journal of the French Dominican Yves Congar, one of the council’s most important *periti* and commentators, offers a clue.<sup>7</sup> During the opening weeks of the first conciliar session that met in the fall, 1962, Congar referred to Blondel’s analysis of “*monophorism*” as an accurate diagnosis of the intellectual “vice of **SEPARATING**, of turning abstraction into a category of the real.”<sup>8</sup> After the council’s concluding session in December, 1965, Congar elaborated on his remark: “If one had to characterize in a word the Council’s theological approach, I would appeal to the ideal of knowledge that Maurice Blondel proposed and that he defended against what he termed rather strangely ‘monophorism,’ that is a reified [“*chosiste*”] conception of knowing.”<sup>9</sup> This Greek language-derived neologism, that literally means “one way,” was used by Blondel to designate two deficiently one-sided approaches to understanding the nature-supernatural relationship, namely, immanentism and extrinsicism. Blondel’s critique of one-sided “monophorism(s)” was an application of his seminal “philosophy of action.” This philosophical project needs to be understood in the context of his personal sense of vocation to offer a philosophical defense of Catholic truth in dialogue with modern thought.

## Blondel’s Philosophical Vocation

From his adolescence Blondel had a keen awareness of the cultural crisis and intellectual malaise that was gripping his society. In spite of the preference of his parents, he chose to complete his studies in rhetoric and philosophy at the secular *lycée* in order “to know the state of soul of the enemies of the faith, in order to be able to have a more efficacious action on them.”<sup>10</sup> He felt called to enter into the

2. See William L. Portier, “Twentieth Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel,” *Communio* 38 (2011), 103-137.

3. *Attente du Concile* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1964), 99ff. The anonymous editor organized these *pensées* according to the following themes: “l’âme de l’Église” [“soul of the Church”], la tradition, “le bon Pasteur” [“the Good Shepherd”], “l’œcuménisme,” and “la nef” [“nave”]. The French Jesuit journal *Études* had previously published excerpts from Blondel’s private journals in “*Pensées sur l’Église*,” *Études* 305 (1960), 145-153. This anticipated the publication of Blondel’s private journals: *Carnets Intimes*, vol. 1 (1883-1894) and vol. 2, 1894-1949 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1961-1966).

4. *Ibid.*, 71. French original: “Un’ère nouvelle s’ouvre pour l’Église, toujours la même et toujours croissante. Au lieu de cet esprit de guillotine théologique et de définition scolastique—et une fois la précision dogmatique, l’unité et l’autorité sûrement obtenues et maintenues—il y a place pour un élargissement et la rencontre avec les aspirations modernes qui viennent d’un autre point mais sous le même souffle invisible de l’Esprit qui porte tout au même berceau.” See also Salvatore Nicolosi, “La presenza di Blondel nel Concilio Vaticano II” in *Attualità del Pensiero di Maurice Blondel: Atti del I Convegno di studio sul pensiero di Maurice Blondel tenuto all’Aloisianum di Gallarate, il 21 et 22 marzo 1975* (Milano, Comunità di Ricerca: Editrice Massimo, 1976), 49-91, at 91.

5. Peter Henrici has written that “no other author has so decisively and extensively influenced twentieth-century Catholic thought as Blondel.” See “Blondel und Loisy in der modernistischen Krise,” *Communio. Internationale katholische Zeitschrift* 15 (1987), 513-530, at 530 (my translation). Hans Verweyen describes Blondel as “probably the most significant Catholic philosopher of the last two hundred years.” Cited in Emilio

Brito, *Philosophie moderne et christianisme*, 2 vols. (Leuven; Walpole, Mass.: Peeters, 2010), 1136, n.61.

6. Blondel’s name does not appear in the onomastic index of the *Acta Synodalia*. It is reported that Blondel’s name was mentioned at least 60 times during the conciliar debates in the aula, but I have not been able to verify this claim. Gregory Baum, a council *peritus*, wrote shortly after the Council: “The Blondelian perspective has been so widely adopted in Catholic theology that it influenced the composition of the conciliar documents of Vatican II.” See Gregory Baum, “The Blondelian Shift” in *Man Becoming* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 1-36, at 28. Surprisingly, the 5<sup>th</sup> volume of the *History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995-2006) contains only one explicit reference to Blondel.

7. See Peter J. Bernardi, “A Passion for Unity: Yves Congar’s Doctrinal Service,” *America* 192 (April 4, 2005): 8-11.

8. (24 October, 1962) in Yves Congar, OP, *My Journal of the Council*, English trans. ed. Denis Mins, OP; trans. Mary John Ronayne, OP, and Mary Cecily Boulding, OP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 119 (emphasis in original).

9. See Yves Congar, “Une approche pastorale de la vérité,” *Informations catholiques internationales* 255 (1 Jan. 1966), 12-13, at 13. Cited by Mgr. Peter Henrici, «La descendance blondélienne parmi les jésuites français» in *Blondel et la philosophie française* (Paris: Éditions Parole et Silence, 2007), 322. Henrici glossed Congar’s term «monophorism» with the phrase: «un système extrinséciste de cloisons étanches,» that is, «an extrinsicist system of enclosed compartments.»

10. Oliva Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel: A Philosophical Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 102. Blanchette’s magisterial study of Blondel’s career and writings is the most comprehensive monograph on Blondel.

lists as a philosophical apologist for Christian truth that was being disparaged or dismissed by the secular intelligentsia. During his university studies in Paris at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, he conceived of a strictly philosophical project that would show the illegitimacy of the reigning “separated” philosophy, which considered supernatural religion to be utterly superfluous to self-sufficient reason’s capacity to explain reality.<sup>11</sup> Blondel aimed to construct a compelling philosophical argument to show that the immanent order is not self-sufficient and that it requires the supernatural order for its completion.

Blondel’s original philosophy of the supernatural first came to systematic expression in his controversial dissertation *L’Action*.<sup>12</sup> His fundamental insight was to conceive of “action” as the link between thought and being. The term “action” was not even defined in the standard philosophical dictionary of the period! Blondel’s genius was to elaborate a meticulous phenomenology or description of the strivings of human willing that become embodied in the progressive expansions of human action, from the most elementary sensory experience to the highest cultural achievements. He focused attention on the inevitable disproportion between what he termed the “willing will” (*volonté voulante*) and the “willed will” (*volonté voulue*). The “willing will” is the inexhaustible aspiration for the infinite that is never fully satisfied by the “willed will,” i.e., the specific, concrete instances of willing. James Le Grys epitomized Blondel’s primordial insight: “The life of action is marked by the constant struggle to equal ourselves caused by the presence of the infinite within us, not the serenity of an emancipation through speculation.”<sup>13</sup>

Blondel argued that fidelity to the determinism of human action must lead to this “doubly imperious conclusion: it is impossible not to recognize the insufficiency of the whole natural order and not to feel an ulterior need; it is impossible to find within oneself something to satisfy this religious need. *It is necessary*; and *it is impracticable*.”<sup>14</sup> The “it” refers to the supernatural that Blondel’s secular university contemporaries ignored or denied. Having disclosed the necessity for a supernatural completion of human willing, Blondel’s method of immanence claimed to show that only the option for the “one thing necessary” (Luke 10:42), that is, supernatural religion, could give ultimate meaning and coherence to the human project. Human efforts alone are powerless to bring this about and so, from the human side, supernatural fulfillment is “impracticable.” However, once the offer of supernatural

completion becomes known, to deliberately close oneself off to it has moral consequences. Then the irrepressible human aspiration for the infinite will tend to absolutize some finite reality as an idolatrous *Ersatz* in place of authentic supernatural fulfillment. Blondel referred to this futile absolutizing of the finite as “superstition.” Consciously going beyond what philosophy can strictly assert, Blondel concluded *Action* with his own personal witness as a Christian believer to the reality of the “one thing necessary”:

It is for philosophy to show the necessity of posing the alternative: “Is it or is it not?” . . . But philosophy can go no further, nor can it say, in its own name alone, whether it be or not. But if it is permitted to add one word, only one, which goes beyond the domain of human science and the competence of philosophy, the only word able, in the face of Christianity, to express that part of certitude, the best part, which cannot be communicated because it arises only from the intimacy of totally personal action, one word which would itself be an action, it must be said: “It is.”<sup>15</sup>

Between the publication of *Action* (1893) and the First World War, Blondel was largely sidetracked from purely philosophical projects by a succession of controversies concerning “mixed” questions. Blondel took advantage of these occasions to apply and clarify his philosophy of action and to refute the criticisms to which it was subject. In his 1896 “Letter on Apologetics,” Blondel’s strong endorsement of the *method* of immanence, though not the *doctrine* of immanence (i.e., modern philosophy’s rationalist pretension to self-sufficiency), succeeded in winning over many of his rationalist critics.<sup>16</sup> However, he stirred up a hornet’s nest of reaction among certain Catholic scholastic thinkers that dogged him for most of his life. These critics objected to Blondel’s criticism of the scholastic apologetics as a “static” system which “superimposes” the supernatural order on the natural order and which ignores the genuine requirements of the modern “subject.” Blondel was accused of blurring the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders and thus of compromising the gratuity of the order of grace.<sup>17</sup>

In 1904, Blondel published a series of articles entitled “History and Dogma.” After the “Letter on Apologetics,” they are the second notable application of his phi-

11. Though Blondel is not mentioned, Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) helps to put Blondel’s project in the context of modernity. Taylor seeks to explain why unbelief has become so prevalent in modern Western culture. He analyzes what he terms the “immanent frame” that characterizes the modern age and the associated rise of an exclusive humanism that dismisses the reality of the supernatural order. See especially chapter 15, “The Immanent Frame,” 539-593.

12. *L’Action: Essai d’une critique de la vie et d’une science de la pratique* (Paris: Alcan, 1893). English translation: *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice* [henceforth, *Action*], trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). See Michael Kerlin, “Maurice Blondel: One Hundred Years after *L’Action*,” *America* 168 (June 19-26, 1993), 12-15.

13. See James Le Grys, “The Christianization of Modern Philosophy according to Maurice Blondel,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), 455-484, at 480.

14. *Action*, 297.

15. *Ibid.*, 446.

16. *Maurice Blondel: The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* [henceforth, *L’AID*] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). These texts are presented and translated with an introduction by Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan.

17. These critics included Marie-Benoit Schwalm, O.P., Joseph de Tonquédec, S.J., Canon Pierre Tiberghien, Jacques Maritain, and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. For a review of the history of this criticism, see “La valeur de la raison,” in Claude Tresmontant, *La Crise moderniste* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 92-141. See also John Sullivan, “Forty Years Under the Gosh: Blondel and Garrigou-Lagrange,” *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012), 58-70. Tonquédec was one of Blondel’s most persistent critics. See *Immanence: Essai critique sur la doctrine de M. Maurice Blondel* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1913; 3rd édition, 1933); *Deux Études sur «La Pensée» de M. Maurice Blondel* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1936); and «Pourquoi j’ai critiqué Maurice Blondel» *Revue Thomiste* 49 (1949), 563-80.

philosophy of action to a mixed area: the relationship of history and dogma. The doctrinal crisis prompted by the writings of Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) afforded Blondel the opportunity both to refute Loisy's historicism and to show the inadequacies of the scholastic "extrinsicism" that passed itself off as the epitome of orthodoxy. Blondel elaborated an understanding of tradition that avoided the pitfalls of the opposing extremes. He considered that both of these positions were aberrations from the genuine tradition. Rooted in flawed philosophy, they were at the heart of the conflict in Catholic thought:

With every day that passes, the conflict between tendencies which set Catholic against Catholic in every order—social, political, philosophical—is revealed as sharper and more general. One could almost say that there are now two quite incompatible "Catholic mentalities," particularly in France. And that is manifestly abnormal, since there cannot be two Catholicisms.<sup>18</sup>

Blondel sought to mediate a *via tertia* that distinguished itself, on the one hand, from the historicism of Loisy, with whom his philosophy of action was linked by superficial critics, and, on the other hand, from the "extrinsicism" of his scholastic critics. Though his effective critique of Loisy helped rehabilitate Blondel in the eyes of some scholastics, Blondel continued to be linked with a motley movement of Catholic intellectuals that were soon to be proscribed as "modernists." Catholic scholastics attributed the contagion of modernism to the "infiltrations" of Kantian philosophy. Some of his critics viewed Blondel's philosophy of action as simply a clever sort of neo-Kantianism.<sup>19</sup>

### The Modernist Crisis and the *Testis* Articles

In 1907, Pope Pius X promulgated the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* that described "modernism" as "the synthesis of all heresies."<sup>20</sup> Though Blondel was convinced that *Pascendi* did not impugn his essential positions, the encyclical not only condemned the doctrine of immanence that Blondel had consistently repudiated, it also censured the method of immanence applied to apologetics.<sup>21</sup> Blondel rec-

ognized that he was one of the "moderate" modernists targeted by *Pascendi*.<sup>22</sup> In his defense, he was quick to point out that the encyclical distinguished three different usages of "immanence": the doctrine that Blondel had always repudiated; an exclusive application of the method of immanence; and a supplementary, non-exclusive use of the method of immanence. Had not his doctoral thesis been "banished from philosophy by the true immanentists [who viewed it] as expressing a pure doctrine of transcendence"?<sup>23</sup> However, though *Pascendi* acknowledged the third use of "immanence" as acceptable, Blondel decided to abandon the "litigious" vocabulary of "immanence" because of the unavoidable ambiguities connected with its usage.<sup>24</sup>

Approximately two years after the publication of *Pascendi*, writing under the thinly veiled pseudonym "Testis" ["witness"], Blondel offered a 3-pronged diagnosis of a pervasive and insidious extrinsicist mentality that he labeled "monophorist" ["one-way" street].<sup>25</sup> "Monophorism" was Blondel's term for a reigning clerical authoritarianism which on principle refused to recognize that grace can be at work from below. Boasting of its orthodoxy, extrinsicist monophorism threatened "the very understanding of the moral destiny and the religious conscience."<sup>26</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar described Blondel's "Testis" essays as "the most penetrating analysis of [the] phenomenon of Catholic integralism (*intégrisme*) that . . . represents an ever recurrent temptation for militant Catholics."<sup>27</sup> It was these essays to which Congar referred in his personal journal.

Labeling the ensemble of philosophical and theological positions to which he subscribed "integral realism," Blondel's philosophy of action intended to overcome various "separations" that characterized modern thought.<sup>28</sup> In the "Testis" series, he contrasted "integral realism" with the monophorist objectivism that divorced the act

gency for the Catholic religion . . ." *On the Doctrines of the Modernists*, 46-47; para. 37. Beginning with the "Letter on Apologetics," Blondel had strongly distinguished between the *doctrine* of immanence and the *method* of immanence.

22. Joseph Lémieux, O.M.I., considered the principal redactor of *Pascendi*, had explicitly named Blondel in a conference that reviewed the errors of "immanence." See *BLM*, 236-238. Blondel's writings were never formally censored by Rome.

23. "L'Encyclique *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 155 (Oct., 1907), 7.

24. See Virgoulay, *BLM*, 276-286, for a detailed treatment of Blondel's shift in the use and meaning of "immanence" terminology before and after the publication of *Pascendi*.

25. *Catholicisme Social et Monophorisme: Controverses sur les Méthodes et les Doctrines* (Paris: Bloud, 1910). This volume is a reprint of the "Testis" essays that first appeared in his journal *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* between October, 1909, and May, 1910, bearing the title "La 'Semaine sociale' de Bordeaux." An anastatic edition of the 1910 volume has been published under the title *Une alliance contre nature: Catholicisme et intégrisme. La Semaine sociale de Bordeaux 1910*. Préface de Msgr. Peter Henrici, introduction historique de Michael Sutton (Bruxelles: Lessius, 2000); [henceforth, *Catholicisme et intégrisme*]. For a detailed study of the "Testis" essays and the circumstances that prompted them, see Peter J. Bernardi, *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, and Action Française: the Clash over the Church's Role in Society during the Modernity Era* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 2009).

26. *Catholicisme et intégrisme*, 71.

27. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Integralismus," *Wort und Wahrheit* 18 (1963): 737-44, at 737.

28. *Catholicisme et intégrisme*, 34-5.

18. "History and Dogma," *LAHD*, 221.

19. For an overview of this stream of criticism directed at Blondel, see René Virgoulay, *Blondel and le modernisme: la philosophie de l'action et les sciences religieuses (1890-1913)* [henceforth, *BLM*] (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 192-210.

20. *ASS* 40 (8 Sept. 1907): 593-650, at sec. 39. English translation: *On the Doctrines of the Modernists* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1980). The decree *Lamentabili sine exitu* (ibid. [3 July 1907]: 470-78) had preceded *Pascendi*. Blondel was relieved that its 65 propositions contained no reference to his philosophy of action or the "new apologetics."

21. *Pascendi* stated: ". . . We have grave reason to complain that there are Catholics who, while rejecting *immanence* as a doctrine, employ it as a method of apologetics, and who do this so imprudently that they seem to admit, not merely a capacity and a suitability for the supernatural, such as has at all times been emphasized, within due limits, by Catholic apologists, but that there is in human nature a true and rigorous need for the supernatural order. Truth to tell, it is only the moderate Modernists who make this appeal to an exi-

of knowing from the subjectivity of the knower.<sup>29</sup> Thus Blondel can be understood as contributing to the larger philosophical movement that is broadly designated by the phrase “the turn to the subject.”<sup>30</sup>

In the “Testis” essays, Blondel contrasted his own philosophy of action with extrinsicist monophorism with respect to three fundamental orientations. The three orientations concerned epistemology, viz., the relation of our thoughts to reality; ontology, viz., the relationships among the different orders of reality; and theology, viz., the nature-supernatural relationship. The first thesis concerns “the problem of knowledge and the relations of thought with action.”<sup>31</sup> This thesis is the philosophical crux of the other two.

Actions are not simply the putting into practice of logically defined ideas and of geometrically shaped theories; and everything is not decided in the domain of abstractions, as if human beings were only pure intellects, as if concepts were the adequate substitute of things and the sole motivation of the will, as if we governed ourselves by them and them alone. In individual and social practice, there is always something more and different than in the speculative systems that appear to inspire it. That is why the ideas that determine actions do not prevent actions from prompting new ideas that, even setting out from inexact and mutilating theses, can become liberating and healing. The life of human beings and of peoples obeys a more complex logic than that of abstract thought; what one does is often better or worse than what one thinks.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, extrinsicist monophorism embraces an epistemological essentialism, a notional realism that claims that our concepts grasp reality independently of any consideration of human subjectivity and historicity. In short, there is a tendency to separate theory and practice and to regard our clear and distinct ideas as giving an adequate grasp on reality. Blondel maintained “that our thoughts are in intimate relation not only with the realities they represent, but also with the profound life of the soul, with our moral habits, and with our entire selves.” Consequently, “to study and care for men and peoples, it is not sufficient to treat them as walking syllogisms, to refute errors demonstratively, by dialectical and didactic means to establish truths that impose themselves as fixed structures, like ‘an unchangeable essence.’” The solution of human problems requires the consideration of “historical and economic evolution, to envisage the science of human perspectives, to rely on the slow maturation of problems, to aid the fumbblings, to follow the work of implicit thought and carry it through to the end.”<sup>33</sup>

29. Ibid.

30. See Bernard Lonergan, “The Subject,” in *Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan, S.J., and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S.J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 69-86.

31. *Catholicisme et intégrisme*, 26. See my translation of the “Third” Testis article in *Communio* 26 (1999), 846-874.

32. Ibid., 26-7. See also p. 32.

33. Ibid., 43-4.

The second thesis formulated the ontology that corresponded to “this dynamic philosophy of thought and action.” This conception of being recognizes the “solidarity and continuity” among its different orders “without failing to recognize the distinction of beings and the hierarchy of different orders.”<sup>34</sup> Reality is an interconnected whole in which no order of being is absolutely enclosed in itself. In contrast with every “exclusive ideology” that compartmentalizes the world in accord with its mental habit of “isolating ideas like intellectual atoms and logical blocks,” reality is a continuum where “there is action from the top down and from the bottom up.”

The lower degrees, without ceasing to be lower and powerless to provoke any ascent by themselves, are nevertheless steps, that is to say, stepping stones (*points d'appui*) and as it were springboards (*tremplins*). The higher degrees [or levels] are really the final cause of this world, which is not a simple patchwork of juxtaposed episodes, but an order in which the unity of the divine design circulates. “Reality is a continuum,” like the circulatory system in which the heart would not be able to send out the life-giving blood if it did not call for and receive the blood to which it gives life. There is no level that does not include a place for a staircase or the movement of an elevator. By the condescension and action of the higher level, the lower level is as it were giving birth to a higher cooperation. Material things become the support of economic phenomena; economic facts, even those that appear to relate to entirely physical needs, are already pregnant with moral and social relationships. One cannot legitimately and with impunity enclose oneself in any one order; there is action from the top down and from the bottom up.<sup>35</sup>

This philosophy of the interconnectedness of the various levels of reality counters classical economics and philosophical rationalism that effect a “murderous vivisection” on the unity of the human being and the world.<sup>36</sup> In a negative allusion to the positivism of Auguste Comte, Blondel declared “deceptive and myopic, that social physics that desires to suffice for scientifically regulating public and private interests from a positivist point of view.”<sup>37</sup> Reality is not a series of “water-tight” compartments that are totally self-contained.

The third fundamental orientation concerned the understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship. Blondel declared this thesis to be “the most delicate of the disputed points, that which dominates the entire debate.”<sup>38</sup> While insisting that the supernatural order is “entirely gratuitous and absolutely transcendent,” he

34. Ibid., 30.

35. Ibid., 30-31. See also p. 33.

36. Ibid., 31.

37. Ibid. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was the founder of “positivism,” an anti-metaphysical social philosophy that metamorphosed into a “religion of humanity.” Considered to be the greatest post-revolution philosopher, Comte’s bust was gloriously enshrined at the Sorbonne in 1902; in 1904, his remains were solemnly interred in the Pantheon.

38. Ibid.

contended that this order is not only “superimposed,” but it is also “supposed and presupposed” by the natural order. Carefully stating that the supernatural order “is never able to be *naturalized*,” he continued:

[The supernatural order] is destined to penetrate and to assume [the natural order] in itself without becoming confused with it. And at the same time that it is proposed from on high by Revelation, the Incarnation and the Redemption, which substantially constitute it and which are not simply facts to observe and mysteries to believe, but reach souls invisibly by the effulgence of the grace of which they are the source, act upon all human beings so to speak from below to enable them to break out of all the enclosures in which they would like to confine themselves, to raise them above themselves, to burst every merely natural equilibrium, to put them on a level, and require them to be in accord, with the plan of providence.<sup>39</sup>

Blondel maintained that the human person must be considered in his actual, concrete historical condition, what he termed “*transnaturel*,” and not some hypothetical state of “pure nature.” “They [that is, the ‘social Catholics’] never forget that one cannot think or act anywhere as if we do not all have a supernatural destiny. Because, since it concerns the human being such as he is, *in concreto*, in his living and total reality, not in a simple state of hypothetical nature, nothing is truly complete (*boucle*), even in the sheerly natural order.”<sup>40</sup> This open-ended anthropology recognizes that human striving, the dialectic of the “willing will” and the “willed will” that Blondel expounded in *Action*, can never be satisfactorily explained or fulfilled in sheerly positivist terms. In contrast, extrinsicist monophorism, claiming that nature is sufficient unto itself or, at most, that nature possesses a “suitability” with respect to the supernatural, unavoidably presents the supernatural as a “sort of counter-nature” and presents Christianity as “a law of fear and constraint, as an instrument of domination.”<sup>41</sup> Blondel maintained that the supernatural order is not a gratuitous superimposition by purely extrinsic command that relates to a purely passive obediential potency; without the external gift being able or having to entail the help of an interior contribution . . . [specifically supernatural truths] are only supernatural in the measure that they are defined, named, and expressly imposed by way of authority.<sup>42</sup> He blamed the “manualist theology” for this deformation of the tradition.

### Blondel and Vatican II: The Surmounting of Extrinsicist Monophorism

Blondel was a decisive influence on the *ressourcement* theologians whose seminal work came to fruition at Vatican II. Indeed, Blondel’s philosophy of action

is “foundational to the entire edifice of *ressourcement* theology,” including the recovery of a far richer understanding of tradition and the integration of history and dogma that bedeviled the Modernist era.<sup>43</sup> The “aggiornamento” endorsed by Vatican II would not have been possible without the scholarly efforts of Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar and others who sometimes labored under a cloud of suspicion in the pre-conciliar era. Their multi-faceted research into the biblical, liturgical, patristic, and medieval sources of Christian life and doctrine enabled a renewal of the Church that was solidly grounded in her authentic tradition.<sup>44</sup> By recovering the riches of a broader and deeper Catholic tradition, the *ressourcement* theologians helped to surmount the rationalistic, polemicized, neo-scholastic presentation of Catholic doctrine whose influence was still evident in the conciliar preparatory schemata that were set aside or substantially modified during the council.<sup>45</sup> Blondel’s analysis of what he termed extrinsicist monophorism was an incisive critique of what Marie Dominique Chenu denigrated as “positivist intellectualism” and Hans Urs von Balthasar dismissively termed “conceptual rationalism” that characterized the neo-scholastic manuals that largely dominated Catholic theological education until the Second Vatican Council.<sup>46</sup> They viewed the scholasticism of the manuals as unresponsive to contemporary needs, on account of its “polemical mixture of defensiveness, aggression, ahistoricism, a fixation on ecclesiastical authority (or the lack thereof), and a rather modern neo-scholasticism draping itself in the trappings of timeless tradition “that employed a regressive, proof-texting method in support of the Magisterium’s teachings.”<sup>47</sup>

### Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

Two of Vatican II’s most important teachings concern a renewed understanding of tradition and the unitary vision of human destiny. Blondel’s philosophy of action was influential for making the case for both of these teachings. These teachings

39. *Ibid.*, 33.

40. *Ibid.*, 32.

41. *Ibid.*, 67.

42. *Ibid.*, 3-4-5.

43. See *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* [henceforth, *Ressourcement*], ed. by Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 66. Blondel is one of the most frequently cited names in this collective volume. See my review essay in *Horizons* 41 (2014), 344-48.

44. See *ibid.*, “Part II: Central Figures of the *Ressourcement*,” 205-302. In addition to de Lubac, Congar and Balthasar, these figures include Marie-Dominique Chenu, Jean Daniélou, Henri Bouillard, and Louis Bouyer. The volume is dedicated to Congar and de Lubac.

45. Walter Kasper has remarked: “There is no doubt that the outstanding event in the Catholic theology of our century is the surmounting of neo-scholasticism” in *Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York, New York: Crossroad, 1989), 1.

46. See Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians. From Neoscholasticism to Nightfall Mysticism* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 22; 126. See also Jared Wicks, SJ, “A Note on ‘Neo-Scholastic’ Manuals of Theological Instruction, 1900-1960,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18 (2011), 240-46. Wicks’s essay is part of a symposium on Kerr’s book.

47. See Christopher Ruddy, “*Ressourcement* and the Enduring Legacy of Post-Tridentine Theology,” in *Ressourcement*, 185-201, at 186. Though appealing to the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas, the manualist method owed more to Melchior Cano, the sixteenth century Spanish Dominican, than to Aquinas. See Gerard O’Collins, “*Ressourcement* and Vatican II,” in *ibid.*, 372-391, at 376-77.

are found in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, [*Dei Verbum (DV)*] which is arguably the most theologically consequential document produced by the council. To appreciate what is distinctive in the teaching of *DV*, it is instructive to compare it with Vatican I's constitution *Dei Filius [DF]* that shaped the normative understanding of revelation and tradition in the period between the councils.<sup>48</sup> In a different historical-theological context, *DF* begins with the strong affirmation of the capacity of "the natural light of human reason" to attain to God's existence. *DF* then distinguishes what is known by natural reason from supernatural truths known only by revelation. Citing the Council of Trent, this supernatural revelation is contained "in the written books and in the unwritten traditions which have been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself; or through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have been handed down by the apostles themselves, and have thus come to us."<sup>49</sup> In chapter 3, *DF* teaches that "we are bound by faith to give full obedience of intellect and will to God who reveals . . . not because the intrinsic truth of the revealed things has been perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive or be deceived." To support the "internal aids of the Holy Spirit" that enable the act of faith, there are "external proofs of [God's] revelation, namely, divine facts, especially miracles and prophecies" that render credible the claim of divine revelation. The apologetics of "divine facts" appeals to the "genuine miracles and prophecies" of Christ the Lord Himself.<sup>50</sup> Thus *DF* stressed a strong distinction between the natural and supernatural orders and proposed a more cognitive understanding of revelation and tradition, supported by an apologetics of miracles and prophecy. This theological approach supported the position that a strictly natural human fulfillment was possible, which was epitomized in the notion of "limbo," a putative state of natural happiness beyond death that is neither heaven nor hell.<sup>51</sup>

Under the influence of the *ressourcement* theologians, Vatican II set out a renewed understanding of revelation, faith, and tradition. The arduous redaction process that produced the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* began with the bishops' momentous decision in the first session to set aside the preparatory schema *De Fontibus* that set forth the Scriptures and Tradition as two separate "sources" of revelation.<sup>52</sup> In contrast with Vatican I's *DF*, *DV* begins with a unitary

vision of the human vocation to "fellowship with us [the Church] and our common fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ."<sup>53</sup> The fullness of revelation is the very person of Jesus Christ, and the act of faith is presented as "an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God."<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, it is Jesus Christ himself, understood as both Revealer and the content of Revelation, who is proposed as the primary evidence for the credibility of revelation. Vatican II's Christological emphasis resonates with Blondel's philosophical work that set forth Christ as the "*vinculum substantiale*" of the incomplete historical order of human striving.<sup>55</sup>

Through Congar's contribution, Blondel's influence on *DV* is most evident in the renewed understanding of "tradition" that Catholicism has always considered indispensable to its self-understanding.<sup>56</sup> The concept of "tradition" is most explicitly and extensively addressed in *DV*'s chapter two, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation."<sup>57</sup> The preparatory schema, reflecting the "positivist intellectualism" of the neo-scholastic manuals, had proposed an overly objectivist understanding of the Church's tradition as a distinct source, parallel with the Bible, of divinely revealed truths. The stress was on the content (*tradita*) of tradition, expressed in propositions, and not the dynamic, creative, and community-based process (*traditio*) by which the Church passes on the fullness of the apostolic faith, often not explicitly conceptualized, from which she lives. "Getting away from an excessively rigid, conceptual, and authoritarian view of tradition, the council emphasized that tradition arises through a real, living self-communication of God in grace and revelation, that it is rooted in the life of the community of faith, and that it adapts itself and develops in changing historical situations."<sup>58</sup> Tradition as a process is grounded in the Church's communal life that is never exhausted by its formulated expressions.

As mentioned above, in his 1904 essays entitled "History and Dogma," Blondel had criticized two defective mentalities that he dubbed "extrinsicism" and "historicism." On the one hand, he criticized Loisy's "protean" historicist treatment of doctrine that severely undermined the substance of the "deposit of the faith"; on the other hand, he criticized the neo-scholastic "procrustean," extrinsicist understanding that forced the fullness of the Church's life into conceptual categories. Neo-scholastics like Louis Billot dismissed the recognition of the authentic develop-

48. The text of *Dei Filius* is available at: <http://inters.org/Vatican-Council-I-Dei-Filius>.

49. *DF*, ch. 2.

50. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

51. About forty years before Vatican II, Louis Billot, S.J., one of the foremost, Rome-based, neo-scholastic theologians of the pre-conciliar period whose manuals were often cited in the preparatory documents, had defended the possibility of a sheerly natural fulfillment for the unbaptized who had died in a state of moral infancy. He authored an 11-part series with the general title "*La Providence de Dieu et Le Nombre Infini d'Hommes en Debors de la Voie Normale du Salut*," that appeared in *Etudes* between October, 1919, and August, 1923. Billot estimated that throughout history there have been a countless number of men and women who were spared the pains of hell because they had never attained the state of moral adulthood—a merciful view of human destiny in a pre-conciliar framework!

52. English title: "The Two Sources of Revelation." See Giuseppe Ruggieri's "The First Doctrinal Clash" in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English ed. Joseph

A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 233-266. Pope John played a determinative role in setting aside this schema. Also see Jared Wicks's series of articles on "Pieter Smulders and *Dei Verbum*" that appeared in the *Gregorianum*, from 2001 to 2005.

53. *DV*, preface. The text cites 1 John 1:2-3.

54. *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

55. See among other essays in the collective volume *Le Christ de Maurice Blondel*, sous la direction de René Virgoulay (Paris: Desclée, 2003), Emmanuel Gabellieri, "Vinculum" et "Sursum", 187-201. Blondel held a Scotist theology of the Incarnation.

56. See Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An historical and a theological essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough, (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 359-368.

57. For a comprehensive study of tradition in the documents of Vatican II, see David Braithwaite, "Vatican II on Tradition," *Heythrop Journal* 53 (2012), 915-928. Braithwaite references Blondel's critique of extrinsicism at 916.

58. See Avery Dulles, "Vatican II and the Recovery of Tradition," in *The Reshaping of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 75-92. I have not followed Dulles's order of presentation.



ment of doctrine as a threat to the immutability of doctrinal truth.<sup>59</sup> Loisy's historicism unacceptably separated historical facts from dogmatic teachings and espoused a doctrinal relativism which neo-scholastics like Billot understandably opposed. In contrast with their defective positions, Blondel's philosophy of action helped to articulate a richer, dynamic conception of a living Tradition and its role in mediating the relationship between historical facts and doctrines. Avery Dulles noted that for Blondel "tradition was required for the transmission of the 'tacit' component in faith, that is, the aspects that could not be spelled out in verbal statements . . . [it] sustains in the community a vital sense of the realities to which Christians are committed in faith. The primary vehicle of tradition is not word, but faithful action, including the liturgy of the Church."<sup>60</sup> Tradition, wrote Blondel, "is the guardian of the initial gift insofar as it has not yet been formulated nor even expressly understood . . ."<sup>61</sup>

The fruits of Blondel's creative reconciliation of these one-sided positions came to expression in Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation [DV]*. Avery Dulles pointed out three aspects of *Dei Verbum's* treatment of tradition that correlate with Blondel's philosophy.<sup>62</sup> First, tradition is not understood primarily in terms of propositional truths, as important as they are, but as the fullness of the Church's life passed on in "action, example, and worship." Not to be reduced to doctrines alone, the apostolic tradition "includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes."<sup>63</sup> *DV's* teaching effectively sublated Vatican I's teaching on tradition into a more comprehensive synthesis. Secondly, *DV's* understanding of tradition is not static, but progressive and dynamic. "This tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down." The Church "constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in it."<sup>64</sup> Finally, there is a deepened understanding of tradition as a process. Through tradition, the sacred writings "are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made actual" in the Church, "and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit . . . makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly" in the community.<sup>65</sup> Reflecting Blondelian perspectives, *DV's* comprehensive understanding of tradition acknowledges that there is more to

the Church's ongoing life in the Spirit than what historical methods can ascertain and what doctrines and concepts explicitly formulate.<sup>66</sup> This understanding allows for the recognition of authentic doctrinal development.

## Blondel's Philosophy of Action and Vatican II's Teaching on Unitary Human Destiny

The achievement of Vatican II would not have been possible without the overcoming of a monophorist understanding of the relationship between the natural and supernatural orders that Blondel analyzed in his *Testis* essays. Influenced by Blondel's philosophy, *ressourcement* theologians such as de Lubac and Congar, who were linked to the ferment of what was termed the "*nouvelle théologie*" by their neo-scholastic critics, had struggled against this dualism during the pontificate of Pius XII (pope, 1939-1958).<sup>67</sup> Writing thirty years after the council, Fergus Kerr's judged that "the bitterest dispute in Roman Catholic theology this [the twentieth] century has been over the proper way to characterize the relationship between nature and grace."<sup>68</sup> He claimed that Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel* (1946), which sought to overcome an extrinsicist understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship that de Lubac traced to the Baroque scholastics, brought about the greatest crisis that twentieth-century Thomism—and perhaps even Catholic theology of the [twentieth] century as a whole—had ever faced.<sup>69</sup> This crisis is not yet resolved.<sup>70</sup>

The consequence of an extrinsicist understanding of the nature-supernatural relationship was to view Christian revelation as a mere accessory to a self-sufficient human nature. This mentality could be pictured as a two-story house in which a putative self-sufficient natural order is likened to a fully-furnished ground floor and the supernatural order is likened to an added-on, upper floor. One can live one's life

59. See Ludovico Billot, SJ, *De Immutabilitate Traditionis contra Modernam Haeresim Evolutionism, edition altera aucta et emendata* (Roma: M. Bretschneider, 1907).

60. Avery Dulles, "Tradition as a Theological Source," in *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 87-104, at 92.

61. *LAHD*, 268.

62. See *DV's* second chapter, "Handing on Divine Revelation," sections 7-10. Blondel's "History and Dogma" articles could be read as a commentary on this chapter. The full text of *DV* is available at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)

63. *DV*, sec. 8.

64. *Ibid.*

65. See Dulles, *op.cit.*, 91; *DV*, sec. 8. The communal, ecclesial dimension is already mentioned in *DV's* preface.

66. See Blondel's essay on "Tradition" that originally appeared in *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (ed. A. Lalande) that is cited in Congar's *Tradition and Traditions*, 360-61.

67. *Ressourcement*, 44. There is an overlap between the theologians associated with the "*nouvelle théologie*" and those associated with "*ressourcement*," but not a complete identity.

68. *Immortal Longings* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 164. Kerr claims that Stephen Duffy's *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992) is the best introduction to this dispute (*ibid.*, 208). Duffy remarks that "many debates which mark the history of theology are ultimately about nature and grace" (*The Graced Horizon*, 12).

69. Cited in Jürgen Mettepenningen, "*Nouvelle Théologie*: Four Historical Stages of Theological Reform Towards *Ressourcement* (1935-1965)" in *Ressourcement*, 172-184, at 178. However, Blondel took issue with de Lubac's interpretation of "*natura pura*." See the correspondence between them that is reprinted in Antonio Russo, *Henri de Lubac: teologia e dogma nella storia. L'influsso di Blondel* (Rome: Studium, 1990).

70. Stephen Fields states that the understanding of the nature-grace relationship is the "key to dialogue between *ressourcement* and Thomism" (*ibid.*, 356-58). See William F. Murphy, Jr., "Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie: A Dialogue Renewed?" *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18 (2011), 4-36. The entire issue is dedicated to this topic. See also the "Book Symposium": *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* by Lawrence Feingold in *Nova et Vetera* 5 (2007), 67-198.

on the ground floor without experiencing an innate exigence for an upper floor. In other words, the supernatural thus conceived does not appeal to or resonate with the depths of human experience. De Lubac contended that modern secularism, expressed in various naturalistic worldviews, has fed off such a dichotomized understanding of the relationship of nature and the supernatural. In contrast, Blondel's integral understanding of the relationship between the natural and supernatural orders can be imaged as an A-frame house in which there is no strict separation of floors. The human spirit is on the lookout for, is oriented to, a supernatural completion. In opposition to the dualist mentality that undermined the efforts of Christians creatively to engage the anonymous movements of grace in culture at large, Blondel's defense of the unitary human destiny in the concrete, "*transnaturel*" order, helped establish the intellectual groundwork for a dialogic engagement of the Church with the modern world that was endorsed by the Second Vatican Council.

The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the one conciliar document that was not anticipated by the preparatory doctrinal commission, bears the distinct marks of Blondel's influence.<sup>71</sup> Implicitly criticizing an essentialist, a-historical anthropology, *Gaudium et spes* employed a phenomenological approach that acknowledged human historicity as having "dogmatic value."<sup>72</sup> It is "the spirit of French theology in the train of the immanence-apologetics of Maurice Blondel that stands behind [the opening] text [of the Pastoral Constitution]."<sup>73</sup>

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds. (sec. 1)

Therefore, this sacred synod, proclaiming the noble destiny of man and championing the Godlike seed which has been sown in him, offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men which corresponds to this destiny of theirs. Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served. (sec. 3)

Further on, the constitution implicitly appeals to Blondel's anthropology that highlights the struggle between the "willing will" and the "willed will":

The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance which is rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions he is constantly forced to choose among them and renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. (sec. 10)<sup>74</sup>

Most especially, the constitution affirmed the unitary human destiny in section 22:

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For since Christ died for all, and **since the ultimate vocation of human beings is in fact one**, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery. (sec.22; emphasis mine)

And again in section 41:

Modern man is on the road to a more thorough development of his own personality, and to a growing discovery and vindication of his own rights. Since it has been entrusted to the Church to reveal the mystery of God, Who is the ultimate goal of man, she opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself. The Church truly knows that only God, Whom she serves, meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer.<sup>75</sup>

71. The text of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* is available at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)

72. "Lehramtliche und theologische Vorläuferdiskurse für [G]audium [S]pes[.]" in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Band 4, kommentiert von Hans-Joachim Sander (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 606. See also John Kobler, *Vatican II and Phenomenology: Reflections on the Life-World of the Church* (Dordrecht and Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1985).

73. Hans-Joachim Sander remarks: "Die Geschichte der Menschen wird damit als ein dogmatischer Wert anerkannt; und vom ersten Satz her haben die Armen und Bedrängten in diesem Wert eine besonders Bedeutung. Dieser prinzipielle Geschichtsbezug des kirchlichen Glaubens greift das zentrale systematische Anliegen der *Nouvelle Théologie* auf, die noch 15 Jahre zuvor vom ordentlichen Lehramt abgelehnt worden war. Der Geist der französischen Theologie im Gefolge der Immanenz-apologetik von Maurice Blondel steht den auch hinter diesem Text" (ibid., 710-715, at 713).

74. See ibid., 722-23.

75. Congar remarks that "the conciliar text can only allude, without detailed justification and analyses, to what is elaborated in the philosophical analyses of Maurice Blondel or Karl

With this teaching about the unified human supernatural vocation, Vatican II quietly let drop the traditional teaching that postulated the existence in history of a self-sufficient natural order, that corresponded to the possibility of a sheerly natural fulfillment beyond death in the putative state of “limbo.” Blondel, who died thirteen years before the Council opened, was indeed vindicated by the Council’s teaching on unitary human destiny.

## Conclusion

Indisputably Blondel’s “courageous life and writings sparked a renewal of Catholic philosophy and helped Catholic theology return to a more authentic tradition.”<sup>76</sup> Theologians as diverse as Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar reflect his influence.<sup>77</sup> Blondel’s analysis of extrinsicist monophorism served to critique the “conceptual rationalism” of the neo-scholastic manuals and the associated truncated understanding of tradition. Most importantly, Blondel’s philosophy of action helped to overcome the dualism that was hampering the Church’s engagement with the modern world. Blondel’s thought has enriched Christian apologetics and theology of tradition, and it has offered an effective model for relating faith and reason. His philosophy of action carefully maps the quest of the restless human spirit in search of the ultimate fulfillment to which St. Augustine of Hippo memorably attested in his *Confessions*: “Our hearts are restless and they will not rest until they rest in Thee [O God].” Blondel’s philosophy of action continues to offer an important resource for a Christian apologetics that appeals to the human quest for authentic freedom and fulfillment, that is both attentive to the manifold stirrings of the human spirit and to the personal witness of people of faith.<sup>78</sup> The fecundity of Blondel’s approach to relating faith and reason was recognized in Pope John Paul’s encyclical *Fides et ratio*. Though unnamed, there is a clear allusion to Blondel’s philosophy of action that “starting with an analysis of immanence, open[s] the way to the transcendent.”<sup>79</sup> On the occasion of an international colloquium in the year 2000, the philosopher pope expressed this appreciation:

At the root of Maurice Blondel’s philosophy is a keen perception of the drama of the separation of faith and reason and an intrepid desire to overcome this separation, which is contrary to the nature of things.

Rahner: man’s openness to what is transcendent, the insufficiency of his own answers to his own questions” (*Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5 “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” trans. W.J. O’Hara [New York: Herder and Herder, 1969], 217). Congar references the “Testis” articles on pp. 220-21.

76. See “Introduction,” *Communio* 38 (2011), 1.

77. See Blanchette, 232.

78. See John Sullivan, “Christian Credibility in Maurice Blondel,” *Heythrop Journal* 51 (on-line: Dec., 2012), 1-15; viewable at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/heyj.12010/pdf>

79. Section 59, *Fides et Ratio*, at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html). See Peter Henrici, “The One Who Went Unnamed: Maurice Blondel in the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*,” *Communio* 26 (1999), 609-621.

The philosopher of Aix is thus an eminent representative of Christian philosophy, understood as rational speculation, in vital union with faith, in a twofold fidelity to the demands of intellectual research and to the Magisterium.<sup>80</sup>

From his youth, Blondel had a fascination with insects. In later life, a special bookplate was made for him with a collage of nature images from his native Burgundy. Prominent on the plate is a grasshopper. This insect was emblematic for Blondel of the élan of the human spirit “that means letting go of one’s egoism and entrusting oneself to the forces of the universe, gambling on them and speculating on what they will do, almost like a grasshopper leaping with abandonment, without seeing where it will land.”<sup>81</sup> The bookplate contains this Latin text adapted from St. Paul (see II Corinthians 4:18): “Per ea quae videntur et absunt ad ea quae non videntur et sunt” which translates: “Through the things which are seen and are absent to those realities that are unseen and are.” During the era between Vatican I and Vatican II, marked by controversies over modernism and the *nouvelle théologie*, Blondel dared to hope for an ecclesial renewal that was “over the horizon.” His philosophy played a capital role in realizing that renewal.<sup>82</sup> ■

80. Pope John Paul II, Address to the International Conference on Blondel between *L’Action* and the Trilogy (November 18, 2000),” at <http://fjp2.com/us/john-paul-ii/online-library/speeches/14715-to-the-international-conference-on-blondel-between-laction-and-the-trilogy-november-18-2000> (accessed January 31, 2016).

81. Blanchette, 625.

82. “Der sichtbare Einfluss Blondels liegt freilich in der katholischen Theologie (etwa bei Henri de Lubac) und überhaupt im christlichen Denken, das im II Vatikanischen Konzil manches Anliegen Blondels implizit anerkannt hat. Das wäre nicht möglich gewesen, wenn Blondels Denken dem gegenwärtigen christlichen Denken nicht viel zu sagen gehabt hätte.” See *Christliche Philosophie*, Band 3, eds. E. Coreth et al. (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1990), 409.