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Forty Years Under the Cosh: Blondel and Garrigou-Lagrange

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Maurice Blondel (1861–1949) suffered, almost immediately after the defence of his 1893 doctoral thesis, L'Action, and then for much the rest of his long life, from a series of attacks by those who saw themselves as the defenders of the very church he wanted to serve in his intellectual apostolate. He was accused by his neo-scholastic critics, at different times, and, in his view always unfairly, of anti-intellectualism, idealism, pragmatism, naturalism and relativism.[1] While there were other neo-scholastics, for example, Le Bachelet, Bainvel and Mercier, who supported him against one or other of these charges, their voices never matched the volume or influence of Blondel's critics in the Church. Towering among the critics was the Dominican, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877–1964). Garrigou-Lagrange (GL) was perhaps the leading and most dogged opponent of Blondel, although the Jesuit, Joseph de Tonquédec (1868–1962) ran him very close, like GL, attacking Blondel over a forty year period, from 1909 until Blondel's death in 1949.

GL had been interested in Blondel since 1898 and his hostility towards him had been significantly influenced by two of his teachers, Fathers Gardeil and Schwalm, both of whom had taken up cudgels against what they saw as dangerous trends in his work in the late 1890s.[2] Blondel's treatment of truth, knowledge and of the relation between nature and grace seemed the neuralgic points most at issue for GL. GL was deeply marked by the Modernist crisis; he fought, unrelentingly and with the fervour of a crusader, any sign of its resurgence for the rest of his life. Less interested in biblical studies and history, and especially concerned about metaphysics (what is reality?) and epistemology (how do we know?), he associated Blondel early on as the source of Édouard Le Roy's pragmatic and agnostic interpretation of dogma and continued to blame Blondel as a malign influence every time Le Roy published anything in the years after the Modernist crisis. Many years later, as another admirer of Blondel,

[1] Peter Bernardi, *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, & Action Française* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), p. 55n32.

[2] Agnès Desmazières, 'La "nouvelle théologie", premise d'une théologie herméneutique?' *Revue Thomiste* Vol. 104, nos 1–2 (2004), pp. 241–272, at p. 56.

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Henri Bouillard SJ, began to publish, GL was very quick to alert church authorities, by every means at his disposal, to the danger of Modernism re-surfacing under a new, thinly disguised form as nouvelle théologie. For him, Blondel and his followers, both at the beginning and in the middle of the twentieth century, undermined trust in well-established terminology used by the Church, put into question whether these well-tried concepts were reliable, and thus they opened the door to relativism, fideism, individual interpretation and so forth.

That other implacable opponent of Blondel, Tonquédec, tried to strengthen the resolve of GL in rejecting Blondel's attempt to emolliate him during the mid-1930s, when Tonquédec wrote a warning in a letter dated December 1935.[3] The gist of the letter is that Blondel is slippery; he denies the criticisms; he expresses good intentions; he appears to accept something could be put better but almost immediately returns to his usual terminology, as if no criticism of it had been made; he conveys the impression that his critics have misinterpreted his position, which has been fully orthodox all along. Do not trust his expression of good faith and do not be fooled by his apparent humility and courtesy – these are his tactics for avoiding the criticisms so rightly levelled against him. Please do not accept his so-called explanations and do not drop your guard. GL's reply more or less says: 'yes, you are right, but in light of his public comments, we need to tone down what we say while remaining vigilant and ready to criticise his next work (which was to be *Être et les êtres*).

It seems to me that while GL sought to protect the currency of the traditional language used in theology, currency that had proved effective in doing justice to the economy of salvation, Blondel put more weight on the living tradition within which the language played such an important part. This living tradition included a set of practices and community life, not just the body of concepts GL wanted to uphold.

In this paper I aim to convey some sense of the nature and tone of GL's long campaign against Blondel and to comment on some of the issues at stake between these two weighty thinkers. Both felt that they were defending the Church against intellectual dangers and each of them believed that the position of the other represented an important element in the threats and distortions that had to be addressed. First, I argue that GL wrongly linked Blondel with the work of another French lay philosopher, Edouard Le Roy, show how Blondel was deeply critical of Le Roy, for many of the same reasons as GL, yet also accused GL of being guilty of one-sidedness (and therefore of an imbalance) in his stance. Second, I very tentatively

[3] Gianfranco Coffele, *Apologetica e Teologia Fondamentale* (Rome: Edizioni Studium), 2004, p. 200.

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raise a question about two possible factors in the tension between GL and Blondel, their respective status in the Church (as priest/religious and lay person) and their differing political orientations. Third, I comment on Peddicord's recent book on GL, bringing out some points of accord between us and raising questions about some of his judgements on Blondel. Fourth, I eavesdrop on some of the (written) conversations that took place, between GL and Blondel during the 1930s and 40s, when, despite some softening in the language they used in relation to each other, there remained ongoing differences that each found disappointing at best and sometimes frustrating or even painful. Here Blondel tries to defend his approach to apologetics and to explain his deployment of the terms pneumatic and noetic with regard to knowledge and truth. Finally, in looking back on this painful episode in the church's history, I draw attention to papal approval of both GL and Blondel, suggest that Thomism and Blondelianism were closer than was assumed, despite the suspicions nurtured between the two adversaries who are the focus of this paper, and conclude by suggesting that there were more fundamental areas of agreement than disagreement between these defenders of faith, if only they could recognise this.

1. Le Roy, GL and one-sidedness

GL associated Blondel much too closely with Le Roy and seemed unaware of the care with which Blondel separated his position from that of Le Roy. "What Blondel speaks of as the condition of entering into faith – action, practices – Le Roy makes the *meaning* and *content* of the faith affirmed," says one leading commentator in his doctoral thesis on Le Roy and his scholastic opponents.[4] GL, seeing what Le Roy had made of the method of immanence deployed by Blondel and his associate Lucien Laberthonnière, argued that the exclusive method of immanence was not reconcilable with church teaching. But both Blondel and Laberthonnière denied that their approach was exclusively one of immanence. They both speak of needing divine assistance for knowledge of God and the supernatural: such knowledge, for them, is *not* merely an end-product of our own search, nor of our own making. GL thought that they gave too little weight to rationality and objective truth. "In order to know what dogma is," he said, "it is not the present needs of souls which one should study; it is dogma itself, and its study will point us to excite in souls aspirations which are profound and interesting in ways other than those of which one

[4] Guy Mansini, *"What is a Dogma?" The Meaning and Truth of Dogma in Edouard Le Roy and his Scholastic Opponents* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1985), p. 74.

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now speaks."[5] He had a suspicion of any reliance on experience or intuition as ways to knowledge; they did not adhere closely enough to the metaphysical principles of identity, non-contradiction, unity, causality, and finality.

In these early years of the unhappy relationship between GL and Blondel, despite including both Blondel and Laberthonnière as targets of criticism, GL seemed more concerned to attack Le Roy. He might have felt less negative about Blondel if he had taken proper account of the objections levelled by Blondel against Le Roy. Blondel thought Le Roy treated the relationship between experience and practice on the one hand and ideas or concepts on the other hand too unilaterally, from below to above, not, as is required, reciprocally, allowing also for an influence of an idea on experience. It is not just life that leads to an idea, but an idea contained in teaching can touch a life. The relationship between a teaching and a practice is two-way. "Dogma and precept call one another forth, lead one another by turns. . . . Dogma is *only* a fruit of action for Le Roy; for Blondel it is first a seed . . . which then subsequently brings forth the fruit both of action and further dogma."[6] For Blondel discourse (and the concepts that constitute its building bocks) and practice interact; both are essential; each illuminates, fills out and guides the other.

One-sidedness is the issue here. Blondel judged that Le Roy was one-sided in over-emphasising experience and practice. But he judged that GL was also one-sided in adopting too narrow a reliance on concepts and rational knowledge, without reference to a broader appreciation of the confluence of practice and concept. Blondel was concerned more about the conditions of knowing, including the non-conceptual aspects of knowing. His focus is the 'on the way' nature of faith, while GL seems to adopt a perspective of having definitively arrived. While for Blondel faith and the fullness of knowledge remain still to be gained, for GL the task is to protect from loss and to preserve from contamination what has been gained already. Le Roy was for Blondel one-sided in neglecting the essential part played by categorical, 'proposed' revelation, what comes to us externally, as it were, while correct in stressing the inner dimension and context, where infused grace helps us be ready to recognise and affirm what approaches us from 'outside.'[7] Lonergan would agree that the gift of God's love needs the external word of tradition to be correctly interpreted and avowed.[8] As Guy Mansini says, in his

[5] GL, quoted by Michael Kerlin, 'Anti-Modernism and the elective affinity between politics and philosophy' in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity,* edited by Darrell Jodock, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 315–16.

[6] Mansini, p. 92.

[7] Ibid., p. 330.

[8] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 113.

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probing examination of Le Roy and his scholastic opponents, "To list the conditions of understanding a meaning, the consequences of grasping a meaning, the way of verifying the adequacy of the meaning and its truth – none of this is to state the meaning of the statement."[9] Le Roy allows too little role for the intellect in our co-operation with God's saving grace. But GL perhaps allows too much. Here is one-sidedness again. Monophorisme, or one-way thinking, is a key theme in much of Blondel's work, though not something I can pursue here.[10] He blamed both le Roy and GL for displaying it. On Le Roy's view of dogma, no teaching is possible, because for him discourse about an object cannot inform us about it; it can only guide us in how to act in relation to it. Here, discourse does too little. But, just as bad, with GL's account of common sense, no real learning is necessary; rather, we simply need to unpack, refine and make more explicit and precise what we already know in primitive form. With GL, discourse does too much; relying on it to do too much means we fail to acknowledge that religious practice carries us beyond what discourse can convey on its own, extending its reach, deepening its influence on how and what we see and value, and helping us to understand better the significance and implications of doctrinal teaching.[11] But Blondel does *not* deny that we *do* learn about the object of our faith through concepts and discourse. These are not empty; they are necessary; but they are not enough.

This did not satisfy GL, who was concerned that, in *L'Action*, Blondel failed to make a sufficiently strong connection between the free option (for God rather than against him) and adhering to the ontological value of first principles. GL objected to the way Blondel in *L'Action* seemed to suggest there was no knowledge of God before the option, since this seemed to subordinate knowledge to the will. He did not see how Blondel treated the relationship between knowledge and the will as a kind of dance with each partner circulating around and leading forward the other. In a recent chapter, Emmanuel Tourpe has claimed that in this respect Blondel was merely presenting a view that is present in St Thomas.[12] GL thought that Blondel's option was for God as the good, but not as the truth. This was moral dogmatism and fell short of traditional metaphysics.[13] According to GL, Blondel brings us to an affective knowledge of God, rather than to a truly

[9] Mansini, p. 346.

[10] See Maurice Blondel, *Une alliance contre nature: catholicisme et intégrisme* (Bruxelles: Editions Lessius, 2000).

[11] Mansini, p. 373.

[12] Emmanuel Tourpe, 'Blondel et le Thomisme' in *Blondel entre L'Action et la Trilogie*, edited by Marc Leclerc (Bruxelles: Editions Lessius, 2003), pp. 52–65, at p. 57.

[13] Undated letter from GL to Blondel, in Coffele, p. 214.

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intellectual knowledge of God. It is true that Blondel emphasised faith as confidence more than faith as belief because he wanted to engage the whole person, not just the intellect.[14] Blondel thought that analogical, abstract and conceptual knowledge is not superior, as GL claimed.[15] Blondel's intention was neither to disregard nor to reject the traditional arguments, but to make manifest their true weight and the conditions in which they could be perceived.[16] He did not see himself as producing a purely subjective apologetics preceding an objective apologetics as follow-up. As Bouillard saw, "this would be to separate what Blondel wanted to unite: the compenetration of the subjective and the objective in the perception of credibility."[17] The traditional motives of credibility serve as signs that still need to be interpreted. Once again, perceived one-sidedness in approach seemed at stake.

2. Two possible factors at work

There is a telling comment from Ambrose Gardeil in a letter to the Holy Office in June 1913: "the works of Blondel, a layman, have no authority for the faithful or for theologians – but the Dictionary which contains an article (by Albert Valensin) on the method of immanence does have authority in France and is used in seminaries."[18] Can one suggest that the sheer temerity of Blondel, speaking thus as a lay person, articulating theological arguments against some priests and religious, might also be underlying some of the resentment felt by GL against him?

Political differences also played a part in the tension between GL and Blondel and made each suspicious of the other. GL's affinity with and sympathy for Action Française made Blondel reluctant to concede too much to his criticisms. I think Bernardi has provided an excellent analysis in unpacking the unsavoury political implications of right-wing Catholic thinking as displayed by the Jesuit, Pedro Descoqs, who engaged in a series of disputes with Blondel.[19] Blondel's friend, Laberthonnière, devoted a whole book to exposing connections between positivism and Action Française.[20] Could one claim that a major factor in the enduring tension between Blondel and GL is that each of these protagonists disapproved of the friends of the

[14] Henri Bouillard, *Vérité du Christianisme* (Paris: Désclée de Brouwer, 1989), p. 78.
[15] Coffele, p. 215.
[16] Bouillard, p. 77.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Coffele, p. 198.
[19] Bernardi. See note 1.
[20] Laberthonnière, *Positivisme et catholicisme: à propos de 'l'Action Française*, (Paris: Bloud et Cie, 1911).

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other and thought that they kept bad company. As a result, the ideas they held were judged to be dangerous. As far as I can tell, political differences, especially over the cause of Franco in the Spanish Civil War, led to a cooling of the once close relationship between GL and his former ally, Jacques Maritain (who refused to endorse Franco's cause as one with the Church). These two former allies, as opponents of Blondel, differed too about the respective legitimacy of Pétain and de Gaulle.

3. Peddicord on Blondel

Richard Peddicord and Aidan Nichols have recently provided different but complementary critical retrievals of the life and thought of GL[21]. Apart from agreeing with Nichols that externality is a positive term to use in connection with revelation, that congruence with human aspirations and needs can only have a secondary place in Christian apologetics and that revelation is mediated rather than immediate,[22] my focus here is on Peddicord's book.

First, I find helpful Peddicord's report on a request made by GL in 1947 to Blondel. In 1906 Blondel had proposed 'to the abstract and chimerical *adequatio speculativa rei et intellectus* should be substituted the right methodological research, *adequatio realis mentis et vitae*.' GL asked Blondel "to remove the word 'chimerical' and to replace 'should be substituted' with 'is completed by'."[23] Blondel only gradually came to realise how his 1906 formula was a hostage to fortune and needed to be toned down. GL's request for these two adjustments was entirely reasonable. But it would be wrong to claim, as Peddicord does,[24] that Blondel's position is vice versa to, the opposite of, that of GL, in the sense that he wants us to treat truth as the conforming of reality to the subjective state of our mind.

Second, Peddicord helpfully brings out key differences between scholastic philosophy and modern philosophy by quoting Bochenski:

> Characteristic of scholasticism is its pluralism (assuming the plurality of really different beings and levels of being), personalism (acknowledging the pre-eminent value of the human person), its organic conception of reality, as well as its theocentric attitude – God the Creator at its center of vision. . . . Modern philosophy opposes every one of these tenets.

[21] Richard Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism* (South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine's Press, 2005); Aidan Nichols, *Reason with Piety* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2008).

[22] Nichols, pp. 26, 34.

[23] Peddicord, p. 76.

[24] Ibid., p. 222.

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From what I can tell from my reading of Blondel, he accepted all four features of scholasticism quoted here by Peddicord from Bochenski. He and GL were closer than is often assumed.

Third, the distinction made by Peddicord between *fides qua* and *fides quae* is one that again helps us appreciate at least part of the difference of perspective between Blondel and GL. Peddicord says "The subjective experience of radical trust in a personal God (*fides qua*) must be distinguished from the faith of Church (*fides quae*) – the body of beliefs to be believed.[25] While GL's main concern was to ensure that *fides quae* was properly described, Blondel's concern was that ways to *fides qua* should be fruitfully explored. Of course, I do *not* mean that GL was unconcerned about *fides qua* or our relationship with God; I merely suggest that his differences with Blondel were less about spirituality than about how philosophy bears upon theology.

However, some of Peddicord's other judgements on Blondel prompt a few questions in this reader. First, was Blondel influenced by Schleiermacher, as he claims?[26] Apart from one negative comment about Schleiermacher by Blondel in a 1915 letter to Laberthonnière, I can find no evidence that Schleiermacher registered as significant or influential for Blondel. Second, did Blondel think that "the only foundation for a philosophical defense of Christian faith is human consciousness itself"?[27] It is very doubtful if he would accept this as in any way accurate as to his position. Third, I am also sure that he would have protested the accuracy of the comment that he influenced theologians "to attempt to ground Catholic faith upon philosophical idealism."[28] He did not, despite what is implied in this book,[29] think of his philosophy as being intended for use as a framework for Catholic theology. Fourth, did he assert that "nothing exists outside human consciousness"? This is not his position. Furthermore, fifth, despite what Peddicord says,[30] Blondel was deeply sensitive to the need to defend the utter gratuity of God's revelation. Sixth, I do not think Blondel would view as accurate the comment that he accepted the first principles of Kant over those of St Thomas.

Overall, Peddicord effectively brings out how GL was rightly critical of those who downplayed the important part played by metaphysics in theology, but Blondel never advocated a theology without a metaphysical horizon.

[25] Ibid., p. 172.
[26] Peddicord, p. 62.
[27] Ibid., p. 63.
[28] Ibid., p. 64.
[29] Ibid., p. 74.
[30] Ibid., p. 65.

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4. Exchanges in 1930s and 1940s

GL's attacks on Blondel came in waves, with periods of relative respite in between. Thus, the Modernist crisis was the first high point, with some recession after 1913. Early in the 1920's Blondel's contributions on intelligence and on Christian philosophy led to another wave, as did later publications of Le Roy, which prompted GL again to underline the damaging influence of Blondel. The appearance of the first volumes in Blondel's trilogy of the 1930s, *La Pensée*, sparked another wave, as did the emergence of the nouvelle théologie movement just before and then immediately after the Second World War.

Although Blondel found these attacks tiresome in the extreme he thought it was necessary to respond as positively as he could. Blondel expressed his gratitude and his appreciation to GL for his defence of orthodoxy, his apostolic sentiment and his concern for Blondel himself. Blondel constantly reiterated that he wanted to be faithful to the Church, to serve truth and souls and therefore felt obliged to try to address criticisms. A common type of response that he made to GL was along the lines of the following. "I would fully share your concerns if you had interpreted my work correctly, but in fact differences of perspective and of terminology, rather than of substance, are the cause of your misunderstanding."[31] I think Blondel distinguished (a) the task of explicating truth in a systematic way from (b) finding ways to make this truth come alive for people. The latter required greater freedom and flexibility than the former. With (a) one is not primarily concerned with how the truth may be being received by the hearer/reader; it is strict, unambiguous accuracy that is at stake. With (b) one needs to take more into account the dispositions, mind-set, problems and desires of those one aims to reach. Perhaps (a) is more suitable for those already inside the Church and (b) for those outside the Church, although this needs to be more nuanced, first, because no one is fully inside and no one is fully outside the Church, and second, because the main agent of bringing people to salvific truth in Christ is God's Holy Spirit – not the orthodoxy of our statements, nor our pedagogical sensitivity or creativity. GL's home was Rome, at the heart of the Church and he was charged with representing its mind. Blondel worked in a secular university environment and needed to take account of very different mentalities and priorities from those faced by GL. Because of the different target groups they addressed, Blondel admitted [I am paraphrasing his words here] that "Sometimes I appear to accommodate provisionally theses that I intend to refute, since I live among the pagans. I have to deploy the

[31] Coffele, p. 234.

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terminology and concerns of my readers as part of my role in getting them to see the credibility of faith."[32]

Blondel's inadequate treatment of truth was GL's main target. In *La Pensée* Blondel has another attempt at clarifying his position. Here he spends some time on the difference between pneumatic and noetic thought. Blondel does more justice to the genesis of thought, to its emergence, growth and development, its drive and dynamism, its roots in the other dimensions of our lives. GL was more concerned with its outcomes, its fruits, and its finished form. He is not concerned about the ladder by which we arrived at our concepts, the route we had to take, only with how they fit together in a finished and complete edifice. Noetic knowledge is concerned with the intelligibility, universality and the unity of experience and what holds it together. The pneumatic is concerned with diversity and singularity. Pneumatic knowledge allows for the dynamism and multiple levels within experience. It is subjective, on the move, spiritual and reaches out. The pneumatic is within me, a particular, specific being, as the person who has the knowledge. The noetic is about what I have knowledge of, the object of my attention; it is the 'to what' aspect of knowledge, its directionality; where the pneumatic is 'from whom' aspect. GL's focus is on the noetic; this is impersonal, it is about what is intelligible; it links us to being; it is knowledge that is stable and which we can possess and take hold of. Blondel focused more on how noetic and pneumatic knowledge relate to each other. These two types of knowing are, for Blondel, both heterogeneous and complementary. Each is provoked or called by the other; each is only intelligible through the other.[33] They are not in opposition to one another. In response to earlier criticisms, not only from GL, Blondel came to give more attention to consistency in knowledge and to the role of the concept. He gradually adjusted and refined his language in an effort to avoid misunderstanding – but one complication continued: it remained hard to distinguish action from thinking and willing. Action is the master-concept, embracing and including what others separated out into three processes, thinking, willing and acting. Often by action Blondel simply meant life taken in its fullness.

GL says of *La Pensée* that it showed "a profound religious aspiration and a manifest effort not to contradict the official teaching of the church."[34] But then he asks if Blondel's doctrine is really conforming to traditional Catholic thought on the question of truth and liberty. Is it a form of semi-agnostic fideism to base fundamental certitudes on

[32] Coffele, p. 235.

[33] Blondel, *La Pensée,* I (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 4th edition, 1948), pp. 237–240.

[34] GL, quoted by Kerlin, 'Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange: Defending the Faith' *US Catholic Historian* 25 (1), 2007, pp. 97–113 at p. 107.

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an act of will, in a free option? GL seemed to believe that Blondel was too cavalier about the key concepts that played an essential role (at once constructive and defensive) within the cathedral of Catholic faith – more accurately perhaps as building blocks of the Catholic belief-system. Was GL's faith and his understanding of revelation – in the way he described these publicly, not in his inner life – based on a system rather than upon a person? Or was there a disconnection between his philosophy and his spirituality? Was he looking too much for a level of certainty and for a degree of clarity in statements about faith? Was the philosophical 'script' of his faith so tightly written that it gave not enough attention to the Bible, to patristics, to history, to experience and to culture – internally coherent and rational but too monochrome, too narrowly conceived, insufficiently enriched by the multiple dimensions of life and understanding?

In 1938 Blondel's response to some articles by GL was along the lines of "I have not done what you accuse me of doing, but nevertheless I thank you for your paternal advice which will help me to take further steps to avoid being misunderstood and to ensure I do not use expressions that are liable to lead to false interpretations of my work."[35] In response to another set of critical articles by GL, linking him to erroneous new theological trends, Blondel said: "I want to hold together in solidarity both a concern for truth and for faithful practice – our notions take their place in our living – not outside of our life. I think of myself as being quite the opposite of the spirit of novelty you complain about. It is a living and practicing faith that I have always sought to justify and to spread in intellectual circles that so often misunderstand the reason and value of sacramental practice and of an integral knowledge on which the certitude of Christian revelation is founded."[36] He stressed that the life of the Church needs a faith that is simultaneously and jointly intelligent and active. "More is needed than simply making sure that there is an equation between the real and the intellect."[37] We have to engage the whole person and get him to face the question of human destiny and of his supernatural vocation. Blondel had always seen his personal task as one of getting people to face the call, to confront the great option, to detect God already at work in their lives. That is why he thought he was right to connect truth to life as a whole, an image that is more dynamic than reality. Life is *on the way* to something fuller – eternal life. Ultimately Blondel had always been from his student days - and continued to be – inspired by John 3:21: he who does the truth comes to the light.[38]

[35] Coffele, p. 246.
[36] Ibid., p. 253.
[37] Ibid., p. 254.
[38] See Blondel, *Carnets Intimes,* I, (Paris: Cerf, 1961), p. 195.

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In a letter to Auguste Valensin in 1946, Blondel said of his critics, including GL, "I am touched by their concern for the state of my soul," [he had been warned by GL that unless he recanted his definition of truth he would suffer a long and sad time in purgatory] "but I must struggle a little for the truth that they accuse me of denaturing and even of destroying."[39] A few months later, in March 1947, Blondel thanks Valensin for his support in the face of a campaign against him and says he feels sadness rather than fear at a time when it is the union between Catholics that should be more apparent rather than polemical exchanges between them carried out with a zeal that is incomprehensible."[40] By 1947 GL was willing to acknowledge that Blondel's last works manifestly were starting to address earlier criticisms and that they contained some high-minded thinking, even though he still remained far from the teaching of St Thomas.[41]

5. In retrospect

GL, who tutored Karol Wojtyla, was remembered with appreciation when his former student became Pope as John Paul II. However, this same Pope also spoke very positively about Blondel, who was for so many years the target of attack by GL. John Paul II in 2000 referred to Blondel as an eminent representative of Christian philosophy understood as rational speculation in vital union with faith, in a double fidelity to the requirements of intellectual enquiry and to the Magisterium. For an earlier conference, celebrating the work of Blondel in 1993, the Pope had praised him for his courage, fidelity and love of the Church and encouraged those who study his work to learn from him in emulating these qualities.[42] In fact, both GL and Blondel had received ongoing signs of papal approval at various times across the sustained period of their arguments.

Emmanuel Tourpe argues that, despite his battles with leading Thomists, Blondel actually contributed to a renewal of Thomism by bringing out aspects previously neglected.[43] Tourpe traces this influence via the pivotal figures, in the development of Thomism, of Pierre Rousselot, Joseph Maréchal and Aimé Forest. Blondel's work was a factor, though not the only one, in prompting such thinkers to attend to elements that had been overseen or forgotten in the Thomist tradition. Tourpe suggests that there is complementarity and

[39] Blondel-Valensin, *Correspondance* III, 1912–1947 (Paris: Aubier, 1965), p. 227.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Coffele, p. 207.
[42] See message from JP II at start of *Blondel entre L'Action et la Trilogie*, p. 5.
[43] Emmanuel Tourpe, 'Blondel et le Thomisme', in *Maurice Blondel et la Philosophie Française* edited by Emmanuel Gabellieri and Pierre de Cointet (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2007), pp. 223–237.

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compatibility between Thomism and Blondel's work, and that there is not a serious divergence between them, any more than there is serious divergence between the Aristotelian and the Augustinian aspects of Thomas.[44] There were differences of starting points and of method but at depth they shared similar views on being as act. If Blondel started from the individual aspect of action, Thomas started from the universal aspect.[45] However, GL found it difficult to accept Blondel's metaphysics of action, which traced a dynamic link in thought, as in life, mediating between man and being, finite and infinite. Recent work on the theme of participation in the work of Thomas might help reconcile GL to Blondel.[46]

Interestingly, Michael Kerlin says that GL, as a champion of orthodoxy, may have had more in common with his philosophical adversary, Blondel, than with those who might rightly fit into the categories of liberal, neo-orthodox, radical and revisionist theology.[47] But it is often the case that we argue more bitterly with those close to us than we do with those we see as more obviously 'outsiders'. It is a pity that the witnessing to the Gospel of the church's leading thinkers was in this period, as in so many others, weakened by the kinds of misunderstanding and lack of appreciation for the position of the other as revealed in the unhappy relationship between GL and Blondel. "Truth is not to be assimilated to us, but we to the truth." "Only the saint who abdicates all autonomy before God is fully free."[48] Blondel fully concurred with these two statements of GL. Where he differed from GL was the route he proposed as likely to persuade others of these views.

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[44] Ibid., p. 235.
[45] Ibid., p. 236. See also Tourpe's chapter in *Blondel entre L'Action et la trilogie* – note 12, *supra*.
[46] As one example, see John Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).
[47] Kerlin, 'Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange: Defending the Faith', p. 112, footnote 45.
[48] GL, quoted in Mansini, p. 316.

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