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Faith and Reason: Insight from John Paul II and Maurice Blondel Toward a New Apologetics*

Wiara i rozum. Przemyslenia Jana Pawła II i Maurice Blondela –
ku nowej apologetyce

ABSTRACT: This article aims to explore the potential for a renewed apologetics, inspired by St. John Paul II and Maurice Blondel, particularly their insight into the dynamic relationship between faith and reason. Traditional apologetics often prioritizes rational arguments, and personal witness is marginalized. This approach is no longer to satisfy the modern world's existential and spiritual concerns. Facing this situation, both John Paul II and Blondel try to envision a new apologetics that integrates lived experience, personal testimony, and existential involvement, fostering a deeper dialogue between theology and philosophy. Following this *fil rouge*, the first part of this article will analyze *Fides et Ratio*, where John Paul II presents faith and reason not as opposing forces but as two complementary ways in the quest for the truth. The second part will discuss Blondel's philosophy, especially his concept of "supernatural immanence" – the presence of God within the natural – emerges as a powerful concept for rethinking how we approach apologetics today. The final part tries to propose a renewed apologetics – the anthropological-revelatory apologetics, grounded on the convergence of John Paul II and Blondel. It unites rational discourse with transformative personal witness – one that is especially relevant in addressing contemporary issues such as secularism and nihilism.

KEYWORDS: Faith and reason, anthropological-revelatory apologetics, St. John Paul II, Maurice Blondel, supernatural Immanence

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przebadanie potencjału odnowionej apologetyki, inspirowanej myślą św. Jana Pawła II i Maurice'a Blondela, a zwłaszcza ich

* A special thanks to Fr. Dariusz Kowalczyk SJ and Fr. Janusz Kowal SJ for their invaluable assistance in reading and correcting this article.

postrzeżeniami na temat dynamicznej relacji między wiarą a rozumem. Tradycyjna apologetyka często kładzie nacisk przede wszystkim na argumenty racjonalne, spychając na margines osobiste świadectwo. Takie podejście nie jest już w stanie zaspokoić egzystencjalnych i duchowych potrzeb współczesnego świata. W obliczu tej sytuacji zarówno Jan Paweł II, jak i Blondel próbują nakreślić wizję nowej apologetyki, która integruje przeżywane doświadczenie, osobiste świadectwo i zaangażowanie egzystencjalne, sprzyjając głębszemu dialogowi między teologią a filozofią. Podążając za tym wątkiem, w pierwszej części niniejszego artykułu przeanalizowano encyklikę *Fides et Ratio*, w której Jan Paweł II przedstawia wiarę i rozum nie jako siły przeciwstawne, lecz jako dwa uzupełniające się sposoby poszukiwania prawdy. W drugiej części omówiono filozofię Blondela, zwłaszcza jego koncept „nadprzyrodzonej immanencji” – obecności Boga wśród tego, co przyrodzone, który jawi się jako pełna mocy koncepcja pozwalająca na ponowne przemyślenie naszego obecnego podejścia do apologetyki. W ostatniej części podjęto próbę przedstawienia propozycji odnowionej apologetyki – apologetyki antropologiczno-objawieniowej, opartej na zbieżnościach Jana Pawła II i Blondela. Łączy ona racjonalny dyskurs z przemieniającym osobistym świadectwem – co ma szczególne znaczenie w podejmowaniu współczesnych wyzwań, takich jak sekularyzm i nihilizm.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: wiara i rozum, apologetyka antropologiczno-objawieniowa, św. Jan Paweł II, Maurice Blondel, immanencja nadprzyrodzona

In *Fides et Ratio*,¹ Pope John Paul II notably asserted, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”² This metaphor mirrors the prophetic vision of John Paul II: faith and reason as complementary pathways to truth. It also plays a key role in his whole theological and philosophical thought. Likewise, Maurice Blondel accented the integration of faith and reason, arguing that while faith supplies the ultimate meaning and destiny of human life, reason works as an instrumental tool to explore and articulate this truth.³ Blondel’s concept of the “supernatural immanence” – the idea that the supernatural arises from within the natural order, further underscores the interdependence of faith and reason.

Pope John Paul II and Blondel did not live in the same historical period, but they do exhibit notable parallels concerning the relationship between faith and reason, particularly in the existential and anthropological dimensions. Unlike many encyclicals that are dense with Church language, *Fides et Ratio*, for

¹ John Paul II, “Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*,” The Holy See, September 14, 1998, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html (hereafter: *FR*).

² *FR* 1.

³ Cf. Maurice Blondel, *The Letter of Apologetics & History and Dogma*, trans. by Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (Eerdmans, 1994), 160.

example, touches on broader philosophical questions in a more accessible way, with a goal of “looking beyond this limited horizon and targeting the world of culture and philosophy in general.”⁴ John Paul II convincingly demonstrates the indispensable role of philosophy in theology, and the necessity of constructing a Catholic philosophy in which faith and reason intertwine. This conviction was central to Blondel’s life’s work.

Furthermore, John Paul II grounds philosophy in anthropology, underlining the innate needs of human beings’ search for truth, both on the moral level, as articulated in *Veritatis Splendor*, and on the metaphysical level.⁵ Analogously, Blondel opens *L’Action* with such an anthropological question: “Yes or no, does human life make sense, and does man have a destiny?”⁶ Both have concentrated on these existential questions, and tried to provide concrete solutions rather than sophisticated theories.

Again, for John Paul II and Blondel, faith was defined as an advocate for reason⁷ and finding in Jesus Christ, the Person, who is the answer to questions regarding the meaning of existence. In other words, “revelation itself as a form of knowing and as a means to an ever-deepening knowledge of the mystery of being.”⁸

The distinction rests chiefly on the approach and tone of each author. John Paul II, for example, takes a public and magisterial tone given his responsibilities as the Pope, while Blondel’s approach is much more personal, coming from his own existential experience.⁹ Still, the two are united in their attempts to merge faith and reason, and to echo the human being’s search for meaning, which enables them to build a new apologetics that addresses modern existential issues.

⁴ Peter Henrici, “The One Who Went Unnamed: Maurice Blondel in the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 26, no. 3 (1999): 614.

⁵ Henrici, 615.

⁶ Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Oliva Blanchette (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 3.

⁷ *FR* 56

⁸ Rino Fisichella, “Rivelazione, fede e ragione,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 28, 1998, 1, 7. Cf. Javier Prades, “The Search for the Meaning of Life and Faith in the Revelation of Jesus Christ According to *Fides et Ratio*,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 26, no. 3 (1999): 622–23.

⁹ Cf. Maurice Blondel statement: “It is not the case that I receive, or first build, a philosophy, in order then to see how I will fit into it or how I will impose on it the Christian solution. Rather, living as a Christian, I try to see how I should think as a philosopher.” Cited in P. Archambault, *Vers un réalisme intégral: L’Oeuvre philosophique de Maurice Blondel* (Paris: 1928), n. 40; translation from Henrici, “The One Who Went Unnamed,” 615.

Even though Blondel's ideas, particularly his immanent method, were considered controversial by Neo-Scholasticism,¹⁰ and he also suffered a great emotional pain because of *Pascendi Dominici gregis*,¹¹ however, his insights were later recognized as a profound contribution to Catholic theology, thanks to John Paul II. For instance, John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* implicitly reflects Blondel's immanent method, particularly through stressing the coexistence of human reason and divine revelation.¹²

Keeping this context in mind, we now turn to the current state of research on the relationship between faith and reason, particularly as it relates to a renewed apologetics inspired by John Paul II and Blondel.¹³ According to Cardinal

¹⁰ For example, Père Marie-Benoît Schwalm accused Blondel of "neo-Kantianism," "Immanentism," and "subjectivism." As Schwalm wrote: "You [Blondel] cannot affirm the existence of the providential government of the world of spirits. You have enclosed yourself in the most absolute solipsism . . . there is nothing left for each person but to adore within themselves the immanent appearance: 'Modern thought is me.'" Cited in Marie-Benoît Schwalm, "Les illusions de l'idéalisme et leurs dangers pour la foi," *Le Sel de la terre*, no. 18 (1996): 64–87, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.seldelaterre.fr/_files/ugd/ea58c1_47d60eca53424c03b7dc18e746dd27ed.pdf. The translation is mine. See also Peter J. Bernardi, "Maurice Blondel and the Renewal of the Nature-Grace Relationship," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 26, no. 4 (1999): 806–45.

Another example is the debates between Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and Blondel. According to Garrigou-Lagrange, "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." Cited in John Sullivan, "Forty Years Under the Cosh: Blondel and Garrigou-Lagrange," *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2011.01417.x>.

¹¹ Cf. "La foudre est tombée à côté de moi. Poussière soulevée par le coup. Raison de mon silence. Pas de plus grande témoignage que le silence et la confusion subie. Efficacité des rétributions futures. *Jacta cogitationes in Dominum*." See Maurice Blondel, *Carnets intimes*, vol. 1 (Cerf, 1966), 156.

¹² Cf. *FR* 59: "Others again produced a philosophy which, starting with an analysis of immanence, opened the way to the transcendent"; *FR* 76: "Among the objective elements of Christian philosophy we might also place the need to explore the rationality of certain truths expressed in Sacred Scripture, such as the possibility of man's supernatural vocation and original sin itself"; cf. Henrici, "The One Who Went Unnamed," 609–21.

¹³ This new apologetics begins with the simple, living, practical, and immediate knowledge of life, rather than abstract philosophical systems. It is anthropological and revelatory, returning to the intimate desires of human beings and focusing on the concrete needs of daily life – an invitation to come, see, and taste. This approach is grounded in the vision of the union between supernature and nature: *Verbum caro factum est* ("The Word became flesh"). Supernatural is not exterior to nature but inside nature. Catholic dogma can be understood by reason. Therefore, the new apologetics highlights the intersection

William Levada, “The proposal for a new apologetics is tied intimately with the call to a new evangelization,” which John Paul II “set before the Church as the principal task of her mission at the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity.”¹⁴ This raises an important question: what is the present scholarly landscape regarding this topic?

1. Status Quaestionis

Regarding on *Status Quaestionis*, there is abundant research on each of the authors separately, but very few have studied them together, especially from the point of view of apologetics. Through analyzing how these two thinkers emphasize both the human and revelation dimensions of faith, we will attempt to establish the rationale and need for a new apologetics: a kind of apologetics, which combines deeply personal lived experience with a profoundly reasoned reflection and confirmation. This shift not only transcends the limits of traditional apologetics, but also points toward the issues that preoccupy modern society: meaning, doubt, and belief in a non-religious society.

In the limited but valuable scholarly literature that does exist, several studies have explored the connections between John Paul II and Blondel, though rarely in a unified context. For instance, John Sullivan published an article¹⁵ in 1999 demonstrating that one could use the metaphor of pilgrimage as a unifying theme for their thought, because both addressed human destiny, as reflected

of philosophy and theology, “not just against resolutely irreligious philosophers, but also against religious authorities and thinkers who thought they could dictate to philosophy, without consideration of the autonomy of human reason and subjectivity.” Cited in Oliva Blanchette, review of *The Possibility of Christian Philosophy: Maurice Blondel at the Intersection of Theology and Philosophy*, by Adam C. English, January 15, 2009, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/the-possibility-of-christian-philosophy-maurice-blondel-at-the-intersection-of-theology-and-philosophy/>.

The old approach indicates classic apologetics, which involves defending the faith through systematic arguments and discourse. It originated implicitly in the New Testament and became the dominant form of Christian literature in the Patristic Age, with scholastic philosophy being its representative form. These intellectual exercises aimed to demonstrate that faith was solidly grounded in reason.

¹⁴ William Levada, “The Urgency of A New Apologetics For The Church in The 21st Century,” April 29, 2010, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20100429_levada-new-apologetics_en.html.

¹⁵ John Sullivan, “Philosophy as Pilgrimage: Blondel and John Paul II,” *The Downside Review* 117, no. 406 (1999): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001258069911740601>.

in *L'Action* and *Fides et Ratio*.¹⁶ In another article¹⁷ also written by Sullivan, following Pope John Paul II's address to the archbishop of Aix on the centenary of the publication of Blondel's *L'Action*, he described 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."¹⁸ Emmanuel Gabellieri wrote an article,¹⁹ which indicated Blondel's *L'Action* as a "phenomenon of action." It reflects on the whole human person and also echoes in John Paul II's thought.

Teresa Grabińska, in her book, mentioned that Blondel influenced Wojtyła's view on human action, as "the external acts performed in the phenomenal world are inserted into the essence of the human person and remain closely linked to internal acts, in accordance with the principle of psychophysical unity."²⁰ In one article, Peter Henrici indicated that, it seemed that *Fides et Ratio* had an underlying intent that Blondel's *L'Action* could concretely illustrate.²¹ An article²² by William L. Portier also seemed to fit this pattern in arguing that there is a striking correspondence between Blondel's *L'Action* and *Fides et Ratio*. He concluded that thanks to John Paul II, Blondel's overwhelming defeat in the Catholic Church was miraculously turned into a victory.

Based on *Status Quaestionis*, this article attempts to synthesize the positions of Pope John Paul II and Blondel regarding a new apologetics. It seeks to reconcile their stances on faith and reason within an apologetic structure. This new form of apologetics places primary importance on the integration of rational inquiry with the lived experience of a human being. Specifically, the questions that we seek to answer in this article are as follows:

- a) In what ways do the reflections of John Paul II regarding faith and reason, particularly in *Fides et Ratio*, renew apologetics in ways that address contemporary questions of existence?

¹⁶ Cf. Sullivan, 2–3.

¹⁷ Cf. Sullivan, "Forty Years Under the Cosh," 58–70.

¹⁸ Sullivan, 58–70, 69.

¹⁹ Cf. Emmanuel Gabellieri, "Phénoménologie et Métaphysique: De Husserl, E. Stein et Blondel à Karol Wojtyła," *Recherches philosophiques* 5 (2009): 59–74.

²⁰ Teresa Grabińska, *O filozofii Karola Wojtyły i nauczaniu Jana Pawła II w kontekście ochrony osoby i wspólnoty* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, 2019), 131.

²¹ Cf. Henrici, "The One Who Went Unnamed," 609–21.

²² Cf. William L. Portier, "Twentieth-century Catholic Theology and the triumph of Maurice Blondel," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 1 (2011): 103–37.

- b) What basis for an apologetics that claims the integration of experience and rationality does Blondel's philosophy provide, especially through his lens of "transcendence is immanent" in *L'Action*?
- c) What fundamental overlaps of faith and reason, brought into focus by John Paul II and Blondel, are essential for the development of a new apologetics?
- d) In what manner do the anthropological and revelatory aspects of faith pointed out by John Paul II and Blondel facilitate a new apologetics, a method suitable for contemporary audiences?
- e) What are the reflections of John Paul II and Blondel on a new apologetics concerning secularism, scientism, as well as the quest for meaning as challenges?

2. Faith and Reason in the Thought of John Paul II: Implications for a New Apologetics

Inspired by faith, John Paul II remained an accomplished scholar throughout his life. He was a philosopher-pope and dedicated to integrating faith and reason during his pontificate, such as the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* dated 1998, one of his noteworthy undertakings. It aids in constructing apologetics in the contemporary world by demonstrating the interdependence of faith and reason. In the context of fostered skepticism and relativism besieging the modern world, his approach serves as a fortified structure for defending the Christian faith. He was able to depict how faith and reason do not work as opposites towards the pursuit of truth, but rather as distinct pathways towards the attainment of truth.²³ This proposition is fundamental for developing a new apologetics.

2.1. Faith as Personal Encounter and Commitment in Life

In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II demonstrates that faith and reason are reciprocal, working as the foundation of a new apologetics. Faith is not an irrational leap; rather, it is a rational engagement with divine truth.²⁴ He maintained that properly exercised reason leads to a greater openness to divine revelation,²⁵ and that

²³ *FR*, nos. 1, 9, 13, 35, 66, 69, 70.

²⁴ *FR* 43.

²⁵ *FR* 75.

faith, when guided by reason, circumscribes superstition and irrationality.²⁶ This bond is most noticeable in the intention of defending faith in a contemporary world, which is often dominated by doubt and secular rationalism.²⁷

From the perspective of John Paul II, apologetics is not a matter of defending the existence of God by arguments or of attempting to show, in some disjointed fashion, that Christianity is true. More properly, it helps someone understand how these truths are connected to reality in the life of a human being.²⁸ For him, faith is not merely an intellectual agreement. It is, first and foremost, an existential encounter — a personal meeting with God.²⁹ He further clarifies in

²⁶ *FR* 36.

²⁷ *FR* 32.

²⁸ For instance, In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II advocated for a new evangelization aimed at integrating the Gospel into diverse human cultures as a form of modern apologetics; John Paul II, “Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*,” The Holy See, December 7, 1999, no. 52, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html. Additionally, in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, he dedicated two chapters to the topic of God’s existence. In the first chapter, he praised the philosophical method of Thomas Aquinas, particularly the Five Ways, which argues for God’s existence through concepts such as motion, causality, contingency, degrees of perfection, and design in nature. However, in the second chapter, John Paul II offered a different perspective. He emphasized that the recognition of God arises not from abstract philosophical reasoning but from the human person’s innate search for meaning and purpose in existence. He noted, “The response to the question ‘*An Deus sit*’ is not only an issue that touches the intellect; it is, at the same time, an issue that has a strong impact on all of human existence. It depends on a multitude of situations in which man searches for his existence . . . questing God’s existence is intimately united with the purpose of human existence. Not only is it a question of intellect; it is also a question of the will, even a question of the human heart.” This perspective highlights humanity’s intrinsic nature as ethical and religious beings. Cited in John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee (Jonathan Cape, 1994), 30–31. In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II further explored the relationship between faith and reason, particularly through the concept of *Intelligo ut credam* (“I understand in order to believe”). Drawing from Acts 17:22–23, he affirmed that St. Paul recognized the human heart’s profound longing for God, the infinite, and the eternal (*FR* 24). The Pope argued that the search for truth and meaning is so deeply embedded in human nature, because “life in fact can never be grounded upon doubt, uncertainty or deceit; such an existence would be threatened constantly by fear and anxiety” (*FR* 28). As he eloquently stated, “Belief is often humanly richer than mere evidence, because it involves an interpersonal relationship and brings into play not only a person’s capacity to know but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others, to enter into a relationship with them which is intimate and enduring” (*FR* 32).

²⁹ John Paul II, “Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*,” The Holy See, August 6, 1993, no. 88, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

Fides et Ratio that, faith is a decision that commits the totality, the wholeness of a person³⁰ and responds to the most fundamental and most unsettling questions of human existence. In this manner, apologetics must engage not only the intellect but also the heart, presenting Christianity as a life-transforming reality.

John Paul II focuses on the witness of the martyrs, supporting the faith as part of the defense that goes beyond reasoned argument — the intellectual apologetics. He balances this with the words,

From the moment they speak to us of what we perceive deep down as the truth we have sought for so long, the martyrs provide evidence of a love that has no need of lengthy arguments to convince. The martyrs stir in us a profound trust because they give voice to what we already feel, and they declare what we would like to have the strength to express.³¹

Hence, the martyrdom of early Christians and modern witnesses takes on the form of an act of living apologetics. These attempts at self-defense resonate with the practical dimension of faith and respond adequately to challengers. The reality of martyrdom is a powerful testimony that, even in an age of intellectual and practical hostility, faith is the supreme achievement of human existence and the crowning, glorious destiny. Similarly, Blondel observed,

Everywhere, the sacrifice of self-will is the road of life for man. That by which we deprive ourselves is worth infinitely more than that of which we deprive ourselves. To practice this rigorous method of suppression is to set in evidence and at liberty that little surplus of strength in us which surpasses all natural powers. We do not acquire the infinite like a thing. We give it access into ourselves only through emptiness and mortification. And if our soul is in the least bit great or avid, we enjoy what we do not have better than what we have.³²

This justification of faith over reason is crucial in apologetics because it gives the believer a chance to explain that faith is not in opposition to reason, but rather, as John Paul II affirms, “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.” Apologetics, then, is about demonstrating how faith and reason are both needed, and how their union can offer answers to the existential longings and intellectual questions

³⁰ *FR* 13.

³¹ *FR* 32.

³² Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, 352.

from humans of the modern era. As Avery Dulles noted, “We may say that while *Fides et Ratio* supports the thesis of Vatican I that faith and reason support each other, it employs a personalist idiom that differs markedly from the Scholastic language of the council. Faith, as John Paul described it, is a full personal commitment that arises in response to testimony in an atmosphere of personal trust.”³³

John Paul II also highlights the epistemological dimension of faith. Faith is not simply an emotional response or blind acceptance but involves the rational acceptance of divine truths revealed by God. Apologetics, in this sense, must show that Christian faith is a reasonable response to God’s revelation, a response that requires intellectual engagement and understanding. In this regard, John Paul II echoes the words of St. Augustine, quoting him to reinforce that “faith, without thought, is non-existent.”³⁴ Apologetics, therefore, must guide humans to see that faith, when grounded in rational thought, aids in the holistic comprehension of reality that is able to give not only a rational explanation but also existential fulfillment.

Here, apologetics takes a new turn, constructed rather as a movement of communication between faith and reason, where, together, faith and reason, each in its own distinctive way, behold the scope of reality. This is crucial for defending Christianity today, for it demonstrates that one is able to have faith without abandoning rationality, but guided by the noblest of its elevations.

Finally, John Paul II’s personalist philosophy³⁵ offers a profound apologetic structure. By focusing on the dignity and value of the human person, he counters materialistic and nihilistic philosophies that reduce humanity to mere biological existence. His insistence on the transcendent nature of human beings and their inherent desire for truth supplies a strong apologetic response to modern secularism. Christianity, as presented by John Paul II, does not obliterate human dignity; rather, it does provide an answer to modernity’s existential questions while simultaneously enhancing one’s dignity.

Through his personal experience of suffering, loss, and survival, especially after the assassination attempt in 1981, John Paul II’s faith became a powerful apologetic witness. His personal testimony, rooted in both intellectual rigor and

³³ Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (Ignatius Press, 2005), 343.

³⁴ FR 42; Giovanni Paolo II, “Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II agli intellettuali europei,” *The Holy See*, December 15, 1983, no. 3, accessed September 8, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1983/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19831215_intellettuali-europei.html.

³⁵ See Ronald D. Lawler, *The Christian Personalism of John Paul II* (Franciscan Herald Press, 1980).

deep spiritual experience, offers a model for modern Christians to defend their faith not just through reason but also through a transformed life. Zbigniew Brzeziński, as quoted by George Weigel, observed that “John Paul’s authority derived from the depth of his faith, and from the intelligence with which he had brought that faith to maturity and used it as an optic through which to understand the world.”³⁶

2.2. Trust in Reason as an Apologetic Foundation

John Paul II asserted that one can trust reason because it is faithful — a way leading to God. In *Fides et Ratio*, he reminds us “of the call not only be hearers of the Word (*auditus fidei*) but also to be comprehenders of that Word (*intellectus fides*).”³⁷ Reason of all forms, and philosophy in particular, aid us in comprehending the Word, as well as in unveiling the assertions of revelation that, more often than not, have a distinct “philosophical density.”³⁸ As the Encyclical states: “Rational reflection also helps integrate the truths of the faith into our systems of knowledge and experience.”³⁹ This is an argument that against the contemporary accusation that faith invalidates reason.

Philosophy underlines a fundamental part of human nature as the thirst for understanding. It also demonstrates how reason enables people to question and to understand existence through an orderly operation. Consequently, humans are able to grasp the underlying meaning of different phenomena. As John Paul II noted, “The rational search for truth” is intrinsic to human nature, because “all human beings desire to know.”⁴⁰ This fits well the apologetic claims which suggest that the exercise of rational thinking and inquiry leads, without exception, to a form of faith.

Moreover, this dynamic drive of the human search for meaning points beyond itself — to the Absolute, who is God. As Thomas Kelly expressed, “The reality of human transcendence is a *leitmotiv* of this encyclical (*Fides et Ratio*), but so also is the finitude that is coeval with transcendence, which is the fundamental

³⁶ George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II – The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* (Doubleday, 2010), 178.

³⁷ *FR* 65; Richard A. Spinello, *The Genius of John Paul II: The Great Pope’s Moral Wisdom* (Sheed & Ward, 2006), 4.

³⁸ *FR* 80.

³⁹ Spinello, *The Genius of John Paul II*, 4.

⁴⁰ *FR* 25.

tension of our situation.”⁴¹ Transcendence, originating from the Latin *transcendere* (‘to step over’), signifies a quest for understanding beyond temporal realities.⁴² This quest is represented by the question, “What is the meaning of life?” It underscored humanity’s innate longing for meaning. In this context, *Fides et Ratio* positions the importance of philosophy in the quest for meaning and criticizes modern conceptions of reason for marginalizing this question.⁴³ Henrici noted: “Philosophy’s ultimate question is the question concerning the meaning of life; thus, what he first and foremost understands under ‘philosophy’ is a sort of ‘existential philosophy.’”⁴⁴ This provides an apologetic response to contemporary secularism, which often reduces human knowledge to scientific empiricism while neglecting the fundamental philosophical inquiries that lead to God. Thus, John Paul II’s teaching is in line with the teachings of ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and the ultimate goal of philosophy is the beatific contemplation.

In response to modern subjectivism and metaphysical skepticism, Wojtyła advocated for reason’s “sapiential dimension” and “metaphysical range.” He strives to revive classical philosophy through his encyclicals, particularly *Fides et Ratio*, against relativism and narrow rationality.⁴⁵ He tries to reestablish wisdom as the ultimate pursuit of knowledge. Drawing from Aquinas, he described a threefold path to wisdom:⁴⁶ practical insight from philosophical contemplation, theological wisdom from faith, and divine wisdom from the Holy Spirit. This holistic wisdom, combining theoretical and practical knowledge, is the cornerstone of a comprehensive philosophy that embraces eternal truths.

In *Fides et Ratio*’s closing paragraphs, John Paul II invokes Mary, the “Seat of Wisdom,” to demonstrate the harmony between faith and reason. Philosophy must enrich theological understanding, mirroring Mary’s role in bringing forth the Word Incarnate.⁴⁷ Avery Dulles remarked,

Faith and reason, as described by John Paul II, are united like the two natures of Christ, which coexisted without confusion or alternation in a single person.

⁴¹ Thomas Kelly, “*Intellego ut Credam*: Reason and Philosophy in Relation to Faith,” in *The Challenge of Truth: Reflections on Fides et Ratio*, ed. James McEvoy (Veritas, 2002), 24.

⁴² Kelly, 24.

⁴³ Cf. Joshua Hochschild, “John Paul II’s Gamble with ‘the Meaning of Life,’” *Studia Gilsoniana* 10, no. 3 (2021): 491–515.

⁴⁴ Henrici, “The One Who Went Unnamed,” 612.

⁴⁵ *FR* 83.

⁴⁶ *FR* 44.

⁴⁷ *FR* 108.

Christian wisdom, similarly, involves a synthesis of theology and philosophy, each supporting and benefiting the other. The Pope also uses an analogy from Mariology: just as Mary, without impairment of her virginity, became fruitful by offering herself to the Word of God, so philosophy, he says, can become more fruitful by offering itself to the service of revealed truth.⁴⁸

This furnishes a powerful apologetic analogy: just as Christ's divine and human natures coexist harmoniously, faith and reason must be united in the search for truth. Bruno Forte describes *Fides et Ratio* as "an apology for a reason."⁴⁹ As *Fides et Ratio* mentions, "Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason."⁵⁰ Defending reason is significant in an age marked by a crisis of trust in reason. It is depicted as the essential instrument for seeking truth and meaning.⁵¹

Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris wrote "an appreciation of *F&R* in a collective publication that followed the encyclical swiftly into print." Additionally, Lustiger "employs a gospel simile to illustrate the benefit that faith can bring to the human reason, in line with the reflections of the papal letter"⁵²:

Like the Good Samaritan of the Gospel, faith is able to become the neighbor of the human reason, not to make the latter the slave of a divine light which would blind it, but in order to heal the reason and restore it to its proper autonomy, in putting it back up on its feet, and on the authentic road on which it can move forward to truth. By faith, revelation is like the neighbor of reason, holding it back from despair.⁵³

This analogy presents a strong apologetic counterpoint to the idea that faith hinders human investigation. Instead, it depicts faith as a safeguard for reason, protecting it from descending into skepticism or nihilism.

⁴⁸ Avery Dulles, "Can Philosophy be Christian?" *First Things*, April 1, 2000, accessed September 8, 2024, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/04/can-philosophy-be-christian>.

⁴⁹ Bruno Forte, "Faith and Reason: The Interpretative Key to the principal encyclicals of Pope John Paul II," in *The Challenge of Truth: Reflections on Fides et Ratio*, ed. James McEvoy (Veritas, 2002), 212.

⁵⁰ *FR* 56.

⁵¹ Cf. Forte, "Faith and Reason," 212–13.

⁵² James McEvoy, "Epilogue: Gleanings From the Reception of *Fides et Ratio*," in *The Challenge of Truth: Reflections on Fides et Ratio*, ed. James McEvoy (Veritas, 2002), 254.

⁵³ Jean-Marie Lustiger, "Un encouragement. Un devoir," in *Foi et Raison: Lectures de l'encyclique Fides et ratio* (CERP, 1998), 11; The translation from McEvoy, "Epilogue: Gleanings From the Reception of *Fides et Ratio*," 254–55.

In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II pointed out that holding faith can radicalize strictly philosophical questions by creating creative tension in the mind.⁵⁴ Reason helps us understand the world and history, but faith reveals that God is actively involved in these events. Faith does not undermine reason but enhances our understanding by revealing God's providence. It demonstrates the inseparability of reason and faith.⁵⁵

In this perspective, reason is respected without being idolized. While reasoning may yield truth, its true significance is revealed in the broader context of faith. Apologetics must emphasize that faith does not reject reason but guides it toward the deepest truths about existence and places it in the proper order. As John Paul II said, "Human beings attain truth by reason because, enlightened by faith, they discover the deeper meaning of all things and most especially of their own existence. Rightly, therefore, the sacred author identifies the fear of God as the beginning of true knowledge."⁵⁶ Therefore, in Christian apologetics, faith is seen as complementing reason, rather than conflicting with it, leading to a deeper understanding of the ultimate truth found in God.

3. The Return of the Supernatural in Philosophy: Maurice Blondel's Vision on a New Apologetics

Maurice Blondel (1861–1949) was raised in a practicing Catholic family and born in Dijon, France. Although impressed by the idea of becoming a priest, for a long time, he had only a simple attraction to philosophy that turned into an obsession to justify his faith intellectually. He seriously considered the priesthood, but ultimately pursued philosophy as his true vocation.

Blondel's philosophical journey was driven by a desire to show that there are reasons behind the rejection of faith. As he wrote: "My inclination was to understand the state of mind of the enemies of the faith, in order to act more effectively upon them."⁵⁷ This mission brought him to the *École Normale Supérieure*, where he studied philosophy and began formulating his original concepts. Reflecting on his time there, he noted:

⁵⁴ Cf. McEvoy, 263.

⁵⁵ Cf. *FR* 16.

⁵⁶ *FR* 20.

⁵⁷ Blondel, *Carnets intimes*, 1:546. My translation.

At the École, I found the most natural and fulfilling outlet for my abilities. No-where else could I have so fully developed what became the driving force of my thought and the central purpose of my life: the pursuit of a Christian philosophy. This effort aimed to examine the biases held by even the most educated minds, to recognize the new challenges and responsibilities of apologetics, and to express a deep desire to demonstrate that Catholic thought is not barren. Rather, it deserves a meaningful place in the landscape of modern intellectual debate — where many believe it no longer belongs.⁵⁸

While studying philosophy, Blondel did not neglect the nourishment for the interior life. As Oliva Blanchette explains, for Blondel, “this meant a life centering on the Eucharist and the Catholic liturgy, which he would later think of as a philosophy in act, in the context of his dissertation.”⁵⁹ From the outset, Blondel’s study of action was deeply intertwined with the Gospel and his catholic faith. He discovered that “in the Gospel, only action is attributed the power to manifest love and to acquire God.”⁶⁰

For Blondel, modern humanity had lost the ability to suffer for the sake of action. He lamented: “In this time, we no longer know how to suffer in order to act and produce. The heart is lacking. We know, we understand, we refine, we contemplate, we enjoy; but we do not live.”⁶¹ Additionally, he observed: “Truth is no longer *adequatio rei et intellectus*; and we no longer live by clear ideas. But the truth that remains is living and active; it is *adaequatio mentis et vitae*.”⁶² Blondel’s task, then, was “to unpack the fullness of this truth from life,” which is “the key to his philosophy as well as to the Gospel”⁶³ — that is, to his apologetics. He sought to establish a form of Christian philosophy to address the absence of the supernatural in modern philosophy, particularly in modern France, where he lived.

Blondel maintained that “thinking of God is an action,”⁶⁴ and he insisted that human action is never solitary. “We always cooperate with Him,” and we “invite Him to act with us.”⁶⁵ This cooperation results in a certain theurgy,

⁵⁸ Blondel, 1:547. My translation.

⁵⁹ Oliva Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel: A Philosophical Life* (William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 30.

⁶⁰ Blondel, *Carnets intimes*, 1:85. My translation.

⁶¹ Blondel, 1:85. My translation.

⁶² Blondel, 1:86. My translation.

⁶³ Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 45.

⁶⁴ Maurice Blondel, *L’Action: Essai d’une critique de la vie et d’une science de la pratique* (Alcan, 1893), 352. My translation.

⁶⁵ Blondel, 352. My translation.

where divine action is reintegrated into human action. Thus, action is a synthesis of God and man — perpetual undertakings seeking an aspiration for infinite growth. Consequently, even the idea of the transcendent in itself, without further elaboration, evokes a transcendental quality to action.⁶⁶

Blondel's philosophical project centered on demonstrating the insufficiency of human reason alone and emphasizing the necessity of supernatural grace. For him, human action is not merely an expression of human will but a collaboration between divine grace and human effort towards union with God.⁶⁷ In *L'Action* (1893), Blondel was the first to systematically develop a philosophy of the supernatural. In this work, action functions as the bridge between thought and being — “a metaphysical reality, intrinsic to being and inseparable from thought.”⁶⁸ Action also works as a meditation, uniting and distinguishing “realities that are mutually irreducible and inseparable, such as nature and spirit, thought and being, and ultimately — though without any confusion of essences — man and God.”⁶⁹

Blanchette commented that while Blondel's religion furnished his motivation, his “reason would have to supply the method.”⁷⁰ Surrounded by a culture that was, at best, indifferent and, at worst, openly antagonistic to religion, Blondel not only chose the basis of his doctoral dissertation *L'Action*, but also tried to argue for the indispensability of the Supernatural in philosophy, alongside the inadequacy of reason alone. He emphasized the captivating interaction of human will and divine grace.

Through this process, Blondel's philosophy reflects the tension between reason and faith, which he navigated through a method of immanence. This method acknowledges the autonomy of philosophical inquiry while affirming the necessity of supernatural revelation. Therefore, Blondel's standpoint is not immanentism, as he argues for an opening of philosophical reason to the transcendent “through the immanent sphere.”⁷¹

⁶⁶ Cf. Blondel, 352.

⁶⁷ Oliva Blanchette, “Why We Need Maurice Blondel,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 1 (2011): 142.

⁶⁸ See Maurice Blondel, *L'action humaine et les conditions de son aboutissement*, vol. 2 of *L'Action* (Alcan, 1937), 393–99. Quoted in Caitlin W. Jolly, “A Philosophy of God in Man: Maurice Blondel's Retrieval of Meaning Through Fruitful Action,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 48, no. 3 (2021): 539.

⁶⁹ Jolly, 539.

⁷⁰ Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 38.

⁷¹ Jolly, “A Philosophy of God in Man,” 546.

For Blondel, philosophy is not merely an intellectual exercise but a profound search for truth and the authentic meaning of human existence — lived out in both philosophical inquiry and Catholic faith. As he wrote in his *Carnets intimes*, “I can legitimately hope, to open a way for the idea of revelation and even the idea of the Supernatural into the obscure and narrow world where philosophical currents are formed, and to win a bearing for them there.”⁷²

Gregory Baum noted that, regarding the mystery of the transcendent in a human history context, Blondel’s thought encouraged God’s presence and activity in the world to be highlighted.⁷³ He has called this insight “the Blondelian Shift.”⁷⁴ John Paul II honored Blondel, saying, “It is this courage of thought, allied with a fidelity to and an unfailing love for the Church, which today’s philosophers and theologians who study Blondel’s work should learn from this great master.”⁷⁵

3.1. Maurice Blondel’s Shift on Catholic Apologetics: The Interplay Between Faith and Reason

In Blondel’s work, we see what marks a new stage in Catholic apologetics: now the rationalistic or extrinsic defenses of faith were relocated to deeply personalistic and existential fronts. His method of immanence, which emphasizes the restive character of the human will and its search for the Supernatural, works as a formidable weapon against modern indifference and skepticism.

The heart of Blondel’s apologetic method lies at the meeting point between human reason — understood as free and autonomous, and transcendence — understood as absolute being. Blondel stated that the human will, by its very nature, seeks more fulfillment than what is provided by natural reason, thus creating an opening for the supernatural.

Reason is open to the transcendent, while human will is always striving toward fulfillment, as Blondel demonstrated. He proposed that humans create

⁷² Blondel, *Carnets intimes*, 1:551–52. The English translation is from René Latourelle, *Man and His Problems in the Light of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Alba House, 1983), 164.

⁷³ Cf. Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (Seabury Press, 1979), 1–2.

⁷⁴ Baum, 25.

⁷⁵ John Paul II, “Address to the Participants in an International Colloquium on the French Philosopher: Maurice Blondel,” The Holy See, November 18, 2000, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/oct-dec/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20001118_blondel.html.

an “opening” for the supernatural to fulfill what is beyond nature, as natural reason is insufficient. Such as his words, “Man aspires to become God.”⁷⁶ That is to say, humans need “to be finite and infinite at the same time . . . We inevitably aspire to be simultaneously God and ourselves.”⁷⁷ Under this context, Blondel distinguished two concepts willing will (*volonté voulante*) and willed will (*volonté voulue*). The willing will represents the ideals humans strive for, while the willed will refers to the actual results that are achieved. “It is the willing will, giving rise to the necessary idea of the infinite, which provides that absolute yet immanent norm present in all action.”⁷⁸ Since the results always fall short of the ideals, humans continually seek transcendence, which ultimately points to God. This dialectical process is not only central to human action but also to the relationship between humans and God. Blondel argued that “action cannot stay enclosed in the natural order and that man must recognize the necessary presence of God at the origin of his will, something he is called to consent to, but can also reject.”⁷⁹ Therefore, “in consenting to this immanence of the Transcendent, he is not only acknowledging his fundamental passivity in relation to God, but also coming to the highest perfection of his activity.”⁸⁰ In this way, “We can only live in a prayerful expectation of what God wills for us, who in turn gives himself only to those who are open to him.”⁸¹ By analyzing human will and action, he reveals an intrinsic human need for transcendence and “the necessary hypothesis of a supernatural.”⁸²

With this approach, a new apologetics can address existential issues that speak to modern people’s main concerns. It turns out to be clear that faith does not negate reason, but fulfills its deepest human needs. As Blondel noted, “The Christian religion presents itself not as a creation superimposed on nature, but as an elevation, an assumption, a transfiguration, a grace that makes use of normal faculties, fortifies them without destroying them, rests on rational foundations, and perfects without suppressing.”⁸³

⁷⁶ Blondel, *L’Action: Essai d’une critique de la vie et d’une science de la pratique* (1893), 356. My translation.

⁷⁷ James Le Grys, “Human Perfection as Assimilation to God: Beatitude in the Light of the Philosophy of Maurice Blondel” (PhD diss., Boston College, 1992), 1.

⁷⁸ Le Grys, 66.

⁷⁹ Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 76.

⁸⁰ Blanchette, 76.

⁸¹ Blanchette, 76.

⁸² Cf. Blanchette, 76–94 (the section of “The Necessary Hypothesis of a Supernatural”).

⁸³ Maurice Blondel, “On the Need for a Philosophy of the Christian Spirit [trans. Oliva Blanchette],” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 1 (2011): 170.

Thus, Blondel developed this apologetic approach by showing that human action, when fully examined, points beyond itself to the necessity of divine grace. He wrote:

It is legitimate to show that the development of the will constrains us to the avowal of our insufficiency, leads us to recognize the need of a further gift, gives us the aptitude not to produce or to define but to recognize and to receive it, offers us, in a word, by a sort of prevenient grace, that baptism of desire which, presupposing God's secret touch, is always accessible and necessary apart from any explicit revelation, and which, even when revelation is known, is, as it were, the human sacrament immanent in the divine operation.⁸⁴

This “baptism of desire” is a prevenient grace that prepares the human soul to receive divine revelation. It is a new apologetics that bridges the gap between natural reason and supernatural faith, showing that faith is not an arbitrary imposition but a response to the deepest needs of the human spirit.

Blondel's apologetics highlight even further the active aspect of faith. Rather, he considered faith to be a reality that a person lives, and that transforms him or her, even the world around them, instead of viewing it as a mere passive acceptance of dogma. This somewhat parallels the personalistic philosophy of John Paul II, who similarly highlighted the notion of faith and reason working together within the experience of the human being.

3.2. The *élan spirituel* as a Keyword for Blondel's Apologetics

Like Blondel, a contemporary of his, Henri Bergson's approach differs on the concept of faith and reason. While Blondel focused more on *élan spirituel* ('spiritual impulse'), which further highlights the rational aspects of faith, Bergson was primarily focused on the *élan vital* ('vital impulse').⁸⁵ For Blondel, *élan spirituel* indicates that transcendence is immanent, without which human beings would neither be able to feel the void, awaken to the inner life, nor fulfill their destiny. It is, in this case, the intrinsic dynamism of human consciousness — the primal impulse of spiritual activity. This impulse not only

⁸⁴ Blondel, *The Letter of Apologetics & History and Dogma*, 162–63.

⁸⁵ Oliva Blanchette, “Maurice Blondel's Philosophy of Action,” in *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, by Maurice Blondel, trans. Oliva Blanchette (University of Notre Dame Press, 2021), xviii.

transcends mere rational analysis, but also stems from the very deep structures of existence that propel humanity towards the infinite. Therefore, this is not a static state but rather an ongoing pursuit, which unfolds in the manner of *onde concentrique* from singular actions but is directed toward transcendence. It arises both from human freedom — *vouloir vouloir* ('to will to will')⁸⁶ — and from the divine *élan initial* ('initial impulse'), described as *une volonté autre que la mienne*⁸⁷ ('a will other than my own'). Thus, human reason alone cannot fully realize this impulse, and it requires divine grace (*don gratuit*) for completion.⁸⁸ God does not exist as an external impetus; He is far more personal. Blondel pointed out here the inadequacy of the natural and the supernatural's immanence. Drawing inspiration from St. Augustine, Blondel asserts that "truth is never a thing that it will be sufficient to consider from without, to view in its abstract outlines, to deal with as something to which access is forever denied."⁸⁹ For Blondel, immanence means that God's presence permeates everyday life, actions, and thoughts, and that deeper truths about existence and spirituality can be revealed through a careful examination of human experience. As he famously wrote, "God is more intimate to us than our own intimacy to ourselves: of God I must say, 'Intus est, ego foris (He is within, I am without).'"⁹⁰ This transcendence is mediated through *tradition vivante* ('living tradition') rather than abstract doctrines, manifesting as an ongoing revelation throughout history.⁹¹

According to Pierre de Cointet, Blondel's *The Trilogy*, rooted in concrete experience, reveals a dual presence within both the universe and humanity — an impulse and an expectation, a coherence and an incompleteness. Taking into account the entire work, each question asked permits us to appreciate the light that emerges from the complementarity of his three metaphysical axes: thought, being and action. As Cointet explained,

⁸⁶ Maurice Blondel, *L'Action* (1893): *Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), 338. Cf. Blanchette, "Maurice Blondel's Philosophy of Action," 313.

⁸⁷ Blondel, *L'Action* (1893): *Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique* (1950), 354.

⁸⁸ Cf. Maurice Blondel, *La philosophie et l'esprit chrétien*, vol. 1 (Presses Universitaires de France, 1944), xii, note 1.

⁸⁹ Maurice Blondel, "The Latent Resources in St. Augustine's Thought," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 50, no. 3 (2023): 602, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cmm.2023.a933265>.

⁹⁰ Blondel, 612.

⁹¹ Cf. Jean-Luc Vande Kerkhove, "Des énigmes de la raison aux mystères de la foi: 'La philosophie et l'esprit chrétien' au sein du projet 'apologétique' de Maurice Blondel" (PhD diss., Pontificia Studiorum Universitas Salesiana, 1995), 46–47.

Must there be a question of meaning? Maurice Blondel raises the metaphysical problem in its full radicality: a reflection on nihilism demonstrates that the metaphysical aspiration of the spirit is a fact, stemming both from our rootedness in the external world and from the dynamism of the concrete life of the acting and thinking subject. The demand for the concrete constitutes the distinctive tone of this metaphysical inquiry into being and spirit. For Blondel, adhering to the concrete means following *élan spirituel* of man, who cannot stabilize himself on his own level because he is meant to transcend himself in the perspective of a progressively revealed Transcendence. It also means recognizing that everything is in the process of realization, according to an ascensional norm that carries all realities – from the physical universe to spirits, and from spirits to the infinite.⁹²

Blondel's structure contains two interrelated parts: the initial *élan*, which is akin to divine illumination, and the subsequent rational adhesion, which stems from human reason. In this perspective, faith, as an example, is more than simply an act of submission, for in this instance, responsive cooperation guided by reason accompanies the surrender to God's initiative.

While following the sequence of steps in Blondel's work, we notice something distinct and very elegant. Faith propels movement like a grasshopper's leap; it turns in expressiveness where human reasoning interacts with grace offered by God. According to Blondel, even though the movement begins with faith, the reasoning behind that leap can still be traced and understood. It is because the endeavor in leap stems from faith yet remains rationally justifiable, as the human reason rests in continuous response to the *élan spirituel*.⁹³

Additionally, faith is an active process as depicted in Blondel's principle of "the verification of duty through the accomplished deed."⁹⁴ Moreover, this quote illustrates faith systematically engaging human reason to justify actions inspired by the steps done anterior to the *élan spirituel*. Although experience and risk do hold relevance to this faith, they exist under the subordinate principles regulated by divine monitoring, along with the rules which human reason must utilize and grasp. This explanation, together with divine influence, demonstrates that, for Blondel, faith is the interaction with God in a rational and dynamically responsible way.⁹⁵

⁹² Pierre de Cointet, *Maurice Blondel: Un réalisme spirituel* (Editions du Carmel, 2000), 11.

⁹³ Cf. Pierre Lachière-Rey, "Blondel et Bergson," *Les Études philosophiques* 7, no. 4 (1952): 385.

⁹⁴ Lachière-Rey, 386. My translation.

⁹⁵ Cf. Lachière-Rey, 383–86.

3.3. Philosophy as *preambula fidei*: Transcendence Is Immanence

In *La philosophie et l'esprit chrétien*, Blondel analyzed the tension between philosophy and religion, contending that both seek to achieve the same objective: the search for truth. Philosophy, for example, tries to root human existence in truth and strives to achieve a higher form of life, whereas religion, when followed sincerely, cultivates the human spirit through truth and nourishes it. Both in Spirit and Truth, noted by Blondel, philosophy and religion have concerns for human destiny.⁹⁶

Despite Blondel's emphasis on interconnectedness, he noted that religion and philosophy frequently operate with different approaches and attitudes. He posed the question of whether human thought and aspirations alone could fulfill spiritual requirements, or whether religion extended something vital that philosophy could not. To bring philosophy and Christianity together, Blondel suggests a smooth, continuous method that helps them work in harmony. This union does not simply involve one or the other; it is a complex interdependence. Christianity's contribution, he argues, is not burdensome or compressive, but rather augmentative, granting "a philosophy open to an inexhaustible fertility,"⁹⁷ not only for "intellectual coherence but also for a cooperation comparable to a kind of conjugal union."⁹⁸

For Blondel, the order of faith is not juxtaposed to a closed rational order as a foreign source. Integrating rational thought (philosophy) and spiritual insights (Christianity) can be beneficial in understanding both concepts. It helps to unite life and understanding, faith and reason. Blondel used such a metaphor for integrating philosophical reasoning with spiritual insight: Christ commands John to baptize him with water, which is the symbol of reason, but at the same time, he foretells the coming of the divine alteration which the Holy Spirit's baptism will bring.⁹⁹ Salvador Pié-Ninot, following the line of Pope

⁹⁶ Cf. Blondel, *La philosophie et l'esprit Chrétien*, VII–VIII. About the research on *La philosophie et l'esprit Chrétien*, see Aloisio Sartori, "Filosofia e cristianesimo in 'La Philosophie et l'esprit chrétien' di Maurizio Blondel" (PhD diss., Pontifical Gregorian University, 1953); Vande Kerkhove, "Des énigmes de la raison aux mystères de la foi."

⁹⁷ Blondel, *La philosophie et l'esprit chrétien*, IX. My translation.

⁹⁸ Blondel, IX. My translation.

⁹⁹ Cf. Blondel, XIII.

John Paul II,¹⁰⁰ commented that for Blondel, philosophy can be described as the *preambula fidei*.¹⁰¹

According to Blondel,

Both faith and reason teach that the supernatural must be humanly inaccessible. What faith imposes upon us as a reality, reason conceives as necessary but impracticable for us. The one declares to be gratuitously given what the other can only postulate inevitably, so that they coincide not by overlapping but because one is empty and the other full.¹⁰²

In this way, Blondel criticized the dichotomy of faith and reason. With this metaphor—empty and full—faith and reason are integrated. Faith is full because faith indicates revelation and a doctrine that explains it; faith means a state of fulfillment with meaning, answers, and wisdom. On the contrary, reason approaches with investigation, supposing, and analyzing, but cannot contribute to the ultimate understanding and the range of experience. Reason has its limits, and facing the supernatural, its limitation turns to be empty. Therefore, “Theology cannot allow philosophy to reach the reality of the supernatural order, or to deny its truth or to admit its intrinsic possibility.”¹⁰³ Blondel explained, “faith is a gratuitous gift, no apologetic . . . Philosophy, in agreement with theology in this, will not claim to bring faith to birth in a soul: confined as it is to human methods and natural approaches.”¹⁰⁴ Philosophy’s duty is to keep an empty space, which it cannot fill by itself, only waiting to be filled by a “secret guest.”¹⁰⁵

As humans, we naturally want to overcome our limits. We want to know more, have more, and understand more. This kind of longing makes us more open to something greater — something infinite. In this situation, Blondel

¹⁰⁰ Cf. John Paul II, “Maurice Blondel’s Twofold Fidelity to Philosophy and to the Faith of the Church [translated by Michelle K. Borras],” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38, no. 1 (2011): 187–90. John Paul II wrote, “More than a discussion of philosophy, his work offers readers spiritual and intellectual nourishment capable of sustaining their lives as Christians, for the intellectual process is a part of the rational preambles for faith (M. Blondel, *Le problème de la mystique*, n. 6); but the latter must not lead us to ignore the limits of every form and school of thought” (John Paul II, 188).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Salvador Pié-Ninot, *Compendio di teologia fondamentale* (Queriniana, 2018), 296.

¹⁰² Blondel, *The Letter of Apologetics & History and Dogma*, 160.

¹⁰³ Blondel, 160.

¹⁰⁴ Blondel, 134.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Maurice Blondel, *Le problème de la philosophie catholique* (Bloud & Gay, 1932), 166.

affirmed that such restless existential situations testify to the unity of nature and the supernatural. He noted,

The supernatural is not a creation *ex nihilo*, an artificial superimposition: it is an elevation of our faculties, a vital and life-giving interpenetration, without confusion, or division (such as duality). This supernatural is not made to remain in itself, in sé, as if it were a kind of distinct being, or a receptacle destined to absorb us by forcing us out of our human nature. On the contrary, it is made to exist in us, in *nobis*, without ever being born from us, coming from us, *ex nobis*. The marvelous and moving sense of Emmanuel lies precisely in his coming to dwell among us, for us, in us, at once with his carnal birth, with his Eucharistic gift, with his mystical life in which we see two unmistakable lives intermingled yet entirely united with each other.¹⁰⁶

In this way, Blondel proved his equation: transcendence is immanence. It aligns with the gratuitous and supernatural nature of grace within us. This transcendence only truly exists when it penetrates the soul's innermost depths. External events might give us signs or insights, but real supernatural life begins within — through a deep, personal awareness. Just like the Gospel says: “the kingdom of God is within you.” It becomes clear that Christian study opposes the simplistic view held by those who see it either as a subject for approval, condemnation, or a mere tool to transition from rational arguments to spiritual insight without truly understanding the essence of the divine sanctuary.¹⁰⁷ According to Blondel, the Christian Spirit is “not merely an idea or a theory to be defined speculatively, as if it could be entirely known from the outside, but a total disposition of the spiritual being in its knowing, feeling, acting, hoping, and loving.”¹⁰⁸ It is also a kind of apologetics, because “for those who do not have personal experience of this fully lived reality, it will be good to appeal to a sympathy that allows them to hypothetically imagine something of such a state full of mystery, which responds to the invitation: *Vide quam suavis est Dominus.*”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Blondel, *Esigenze filosofiche del Cristianesimo*, trans. Guido Ghersi (Teoresi, 1954), 69. My translation.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Blondel, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Blondel, 77. My translation.

¹⁰⁹ Blondel, 77. My translation.

4. John Paul II and Maurice Blondel: Toward a New Apologetics

Classic apologetics seeks to defend the faith through systematic arguments and discourse. While it emerged implicitly in the New Testament, it became the primary form of Christian literature during the Patristic Age. Its representative form then was Scholastic philosophy. These scholars tried to show that faith relied on rational belief and was well supported by reason.¹¹⁰

Despite its historical significance, classic apologetics has faced criticism. As Avery Dulles observes,

Its bad name is due not simply to the excesses of fideism but, in great part, to the limitations of the kind of apologetics that was dominant from the fourteenth century until the middle of the twentieth. Although outstanding thinkers such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Newman, and Blondel have resisted apologetic rationalism, many apologists have overestimated the capacity of pure reason to demonstrate the fact of Christian revelation.¹¹¹

Blondel critiques this rationalistic apologetics, arguing that it treats revelation as merely external experiential data,¹¹² assuming that cognitive breakthroughs can lead to faith. This perspective leads apologetics to focus on reason and intellectual arguments,¹¹³ often making their approach seem disconnected from the lived experience of everyday believers.¹¹⁴

From Dulles's perspective, Blondel sought to "reconstruct metaphysics from a study of the dynamism of the human will (*Action*, 1893)."¹¹⁵ He asserted that "this dynamism cannot be satisfied except by a supernatural gift of communion with God."¹¹⁶ Thus, apologetics must demonstrate how "Christianity satisfies the desire for the supernatural that is inherent in nature as it concretely exists."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Cf. Avery Dulles and René Latourelle, "Apologetics," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (Crossroad, 1994), 28–29.

¹¹¹ Dulles and Latourelle, 35.

¹¹² Cf. Blondel, *Action* (1893): *Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, 368.

¹¹³ Cf. Mario Antonelli, *L'Eucaristia nell' "Action" (1893) di Blondel: La chiave di volta di un'apologetica filosofica* (Pontificio Seminario Lombardo di Roma, 1991), 233–34.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Blondel, *Action* (1893): *Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, 370.

¹¹⁵ Dulles and Latourelle, "Apologetics," 34.

¹¹⁶ Dulles and Latourelle, 34.

¹¹⁷ Dulles and Latourelle, 34.

In contemporary theology, apologetics is increasingly understood as “an articulation of the intelligibility that is inherent in faith itself.”¹¹⁸ This intelligibility, however, is not based on pure deductive reasoning, but on the lived reality of human beings — people who struggle with sin, are moved by grace, and are drawn toward God, who is glimpsed through the deep yearning he implants in the human heart.¹¹⁹ As René Latourelle notes, “The Church should be the first to be aware of this aspect of evolution and its impact on the human collectivity. The Church must be more human in order to be more Christian.”¹²⁰

In this light, *Gaudium et Spes*, to which Karol Wojtyła contributed when he was still a cardinal, represents a turning point in the Church’s engagement with the world. It is “the first document of the extraordinary magisterium”¹²¹ to address the temporal aspects of Christian life. Never before had a council spoken explicitly about human beings grappling with the concrete challenges of their earthly existence.¹²²

4.1. An Anthropological-Revelatory Apologetics: The Convergence of John Paul II and Maurice Blondel

The synthesis of John Paul II and Blondel in apologetics is best traced through their faith and reason as two avenues to truth, which are harmonious and complementary. Both recalled the erroneous separation of faith and reason and instead demonstrated their interplay as integral to apprehending humans and interfacing with contemporary existential realities. This agreement helps support a kind of apologetics, which is based on both human experience and divine revelation. The points of convergence are as follows:

First and foremost, faith and reason are complementary pathways. In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II asserts that faith and reason are “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”¹²³ He underscores that faith and reason, while distinct, do not oppose each other and are instead interconnected. Reason aids individuals in comprehending what is believed, while faith, on the other hand, serves as the foundation where meaning and purpose are provided to reason. This interplay is crucial for apologetics: faith,

¹¹⁸ Dulles and Latourelle, 35.

¹¹⁹ Dulles and Latourelle, 35.

¹²⁰ Latourelle, *Man and His Problems in the Light of Jesus Christ*, 19.

¹²¹ Latourelle, 18.

¹²² Latourelle, 18.

¹²³ *FR* 1.

“by sharpening the inner eye of the mind, enables reason to rise above itself and in no sense diminishes it.”¹²⁴

Likewise, Blondel’s philosophy integrates faith and reason, especially concerning the issues modern philosophy poses. He contends that faith illuminates the greater truths of reality accessible to human reason. Blondel emphasizes that both faith and reason exist in harmony; one enriches and expands the other. The ability of human reason to seek ultimate answers, such as the purpose of life and humans’ destiny, is responsive to faith. This approach transforms apologetics by appealing not only to the mind, but to the living reality of people in society.

Secondly, John Paul II and Blondel both highlight the significance of interior experience as well as human action with respect to the relationship between faith and reason. John Paul II notes, in his personalist philosophy, that faith arises from the free choice of the human heart. He claims that faith transcends intellectual agreement; it is an encounter with God that transforms a person entirely. Such an emphasis on inner experience is important for apologetics because it helps move the attention from purely intellectual reasoning to the reality of faith lived as a reality of meaning and hope. As Dulles noted, for Pope John Paul II, personalism “is the best medicine for awakening the world from its metaphysical slumber.” For instance, John Paul II “begins his arguments for the existence of God by reflecting not on the finitude, mutability, contingency, and order of the universe, as was traditionally done, but on the aspirations of the human heart for communion with the divine.”¹²⁵

Blondel, in *L’Action*, similarly underscores the significance of human action as a dialogical response to God. In his view of faith, it is more than a rational proof; it is something unveiled through existential reflection on human life and its *telos*. For Blondel, action is the synthesis of faith and reason, for it is through action that the human person’s search for meaning and ultimate truth is fulfilled. This emphasis on action and experience adds a concrete dimension to apologetics about the reality of faith as answering the questions of modern men.

Thirdly, both thinkers acknowledge the mystical and revelatory dimension of faith, which transcends pure rational understanding. John Paul II underscores that faith is not only the result of rational inference but also involves God’s revelation and the mystery of divine presence. In *Fides et Ratio*, he writes that faith opens to “the mystery of God which the human mind cannot exhaust.”¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Avery Dulles, “Rebirth of Apologetics,” *First Things*, May 1, 2004, accessed September 8, 2024, <https://firstthings.com/the-rebirth-of-apologetics/>.

¹²⁵ Dulles.

¹²⁶ *FR* 14.

This recognition of the limits of reason and the necessity of revelation is essential for an apologetics that respects both the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the human person. Piotr Roszak indicated that, “The personalist matrix of John Paul II’s apologetics, based on ideas already discussed by Blondel, leads to a deeper understanding of the desires of the human heart, which find their justification in Christ.”¹²⁷

In Blondel’s philosophical reflection, faith and revelation are not paradoxically opposed to reason; they are, instead, its completion. This view particularly matters in the context of secular apologetics, as it offers a way to approach a person looking for meaning beyond the scientific or instrumental rationality.

Fourthly, both John Paul II and Blondel tackle the issues brought on by modernity, especially the interplay between science and religion, or the shortage of religious transcendence in philosophical thinking. John Paul II proposed a relationship between the Church and modern society, saying that the faith of the Church must answer the challenges of modernity with clarity of reason and the warmth of a discerning heart. Through his encyclicals and public addresses, he consistently appealed to the realms of culture, science, and philosophy to reengage with the Church, insisting that faith does not hinder human progress but rather guides it toward its ultimate fulfillment.

Blondel was writing in a space where transcendent questions were mostly left out of the consideration of philosophy, so he tried to repair the rift between faith and reason, philosophy and theology, science and religion. He argued that human action represents the fullest response of faith to God. This perspective proves valuable for shaping an apologetics that engages with the sociocultural issues and intellectual debates of contemporary society.

Fifth, John Paul II and Blondel highlight the historical and dynamic nature of faith. John Paul II underscores that faith is not a fixed or abstract theory, but a lived reality that unfolds within the concrete life of each person. He asserts that the truth of faith is revealed and understood through reflection on history, which offers a way to respond meaningfully to the changing needs of every era.

Blondel also highlights the historical dimension of faith. He considers faith not to be an abstract idea; conversely, it exists in the actual, historically lived experience of human beings. For Blondel, tradition is not just the passage of time or static teachings; it is a dynamic process of self-reflection within the community. It connects Christian truth with human history, integrating both

¹²⁷ Piotr Roszak, “John Paul II’s Inspirations for Contemporary Apologetics,” in *The Search for Identity and Its Pastoral Challenges: The Theological legacy of John Paul II*, ed. Darius Zagórski and Saša Horvat (Bernardinum, 2018), 79.

divine revelation and human action; therefore, it is neither historicism nor externalism. Blondel also argues that human actions are not merely facts but are “metaphysics in act,” meaning that they create meaning and shape who we are, influencing both the present and future.¹²⁸ This historical perspective is crucial for an apologetics that seeks to reply to the realities of modern society and to show how faith remains relevant to the persistent questions of human beings.

4.2. John Paul II and Anthropological-Revelatory Apologetics: Key Examples and Insights

John Paul II, who actively participated in Vatican Council II, advanced a new form of apologetics through his theological and philosophical contributions, particularly in *Gaudium et Spes*. After becoming Pope in 1978, he further established this anthropological-revelatory apologetics as the Church’s dominant approach. As Latourelle observed, “John Paul II, whose pontificate, more than any other, stands under the sign of ‘man in Jesus Christ.’”¹²⁹ This approach emphasizes openness to the world and concern for concrete human beings while maintaining revelation as the metaphysical foundation. That is to say, apologetics must uphold its dual character — both divine and human. It should avoid the risk of devolving into fideism, which neglects reason, while also steering clear of rationalism, which disregards divine revelation. Thus, apologetics should be understood as a collaboration between God and humanity, integrating divine grace with human action.

John Paul II embodied this approach in his personal witness, demonstrating that the papacy is both a divine vocation and a human institution. His forgiveness toward Mehmet Ali Ağca, the Turkish man who attempted to assassinate him, stands as a striking example. Moreover, he traveled extensively, to almost thirty-nine countries,¹³⁰ driven by the mission of transmitting God’s love to every corner of the world and attending to the concrete realities of human

¹²⁸ Cf. Blondel, *The Letter of Apologetics & History and Dogma*, 265; Cf. Anne M. Carpenter, “Maurice Blondel and the Fights Over Catholic Tradition,” *Church Life Journal*, November 17, 2023, accessed September 8, 2024, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/maurice-blondel-and-the-fights-over-catholic-tradition/>.

¹²⁹ Latourelle, *Man and His Problems in the Light of Jesus Christ*, 23.

¹³⁰ Agnieszka Gałązka and Grzegorz Gałązka, *Święty Jan Paweł II i jego Europa; Saint John Paul II and his Europe; San Giovanni Paolo II e la sua Europa* (Michalineum; Polska Fundacja Narodowa, 2018), 22.

suffering wherever he could reach.¹³¹ At the end, John Paul II traveled more than any other pope in Church history.¹³²

Through his homilies and preaching, he continually pointed out that Jesus Christ is the answer to all human questions and struggles. As both God and man, Christ embodies the ultimate synthesis: fulfilling the mission of salvation as the world's Redeemer. Grounded in this faith, John Paul II remained open to the problems and questions of the modern world. For instance, when addressing the European Parliament, he stated:

Institutions, those of a Europe moving towards unity as well as those of other national or international entities, must always be in the service of man, and not vice versa. The Community institutions are still instruments – indeed important instruments – but they carry out fruitful work only if they put man, the whole man, at the centre of their concerns.¹³³

John Paul II's apologetics did not merely defend doctrine; it sought to show how faith shapes human experience and transforms society. His encyclicals, pastoral initiatives, and personal witness underscored the harmony between faith and reason, science and culture, and the individual and societal transformation.

A key example of this approach is *Fides et Ratio*, which introduced a profound anthropological perspective. Rather than beginning with the question "Who is God?" it asks: "Who is man? What is his origin, his destiny, and the meaning of his life?" Then, he titled the introduction "*Know Yourself*," highlighting a shift toward human beings as the potential recipients of revelation. The encyclical formulates fundamental existential questions: "Who am I? Where do I come from and where am I going? Why is there the presence of evil? What will there be after this life?"¹³⁴

¹³¹ Cf. Giovanni Paolo II, "Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II, nell'aeroporto internazionale di Città del Messico (Messico)," May 6, 1990, no. 1, accessed September 8, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1990/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19900506_arrivo-messico.html: "Il Signore, padrone della storia e dei nostri destini, ha stabilito che il mio pontificato fosse quello di un Papa pellegrino dell'evangelizzazione, per percorrere le vie del mondo portando in ogni luogo il messaggio di salvezza."

¹³² Cf. Mario Agnes and Michele Zappella, *Giovanni Paolo II: Linee di un pontificato*, vol. 1 (Libreria Editrice Redenzione, 2014), 25.

¹³³ John Paul II, "Address to Members of the Presidency Office of the European Parliament," The Holy See, April 5, 1979, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790405_parl-europ.html.

¹³⁴ Cf. *FR* 1.

By referencing various ancient cultures, including Israel, the Vedas and the Avesta, Confucius, Lao-Tzu, the Tirthankaras, Buddha, Homer, Euripides, Sophocles, Plato, and Aristotle, John Paul II demonstrated that these existential concerns are universal. *Fides et Ratio* concludes by accenting the urgent need to lead people to discover their ability to know the truth and their yearning for the ultimate meaning of existence.¹³⁵

Here, John Paul II introduces a new apologetics based on the interaction between faith and reason. He asserts that the quest for meaning and truth is deeply rooted in human nature. His point is that faith without reason leads to superstition, while reason without faith leads to nihilism. Based on the uninterrupted relationship between faith and reason, *Fides et Ratio* argues against reducing human experience to materialistic or psychological terms. It also advocates for integrating empirical knowledge and metaphysical truths.

Moreover, in the homily delivered during the Mass at the Sport Palace in the complex of Olympic Center of Athens, Pope John Paul II emphasized the concept of testimony regarding the metaphorical walls of a city and its watchmen:

The “areopagi” that today call out for the witness of Christians are many (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37); and I encourage you to be present to the world. Like the Prophet Isaiah, Christians have been placed as watchmen on the summit of the walls (cf. *Is* 21:11–12), to discern the human consequences of present situations, to discern the seeds of hope within society, and to show the world the light of Easter that illuminates with the radiance of a new day all human realities.¹³⁶

John Paul II emphasizes that apologetics must move beyond mere argumentation to answer the real needs of contemporary society. As Roszak observed,

The basis of apologetic proposal of John Paul II is the renewed category of ‘testimony’ which is not a simple formal statement or the result of human speculations on God but receiving the Word of God. This testimony has transformed the disciples and made them capable of courageous preaching about Christ. The grammar of papal apologetics is based on the notions originating from the

¹³⁵ Cf. *FR* 108.

¹³⁶ John Paul II, “Homily during the Mass at the Sport Palace in the Complex of the Olympic Centre of Athens,” *The Holy See*, May 5, 2001, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010505_athens.html.

personalist terminology, such as testimony, invitation, response, engagement, fidelity, and communion.¹³⁷

In his address to Canadian bishops on October 30, 1999, he pointed out the need for a new apologetics — one that does not merely repeat past formulations but responds to today’s questions with clarity and relevance. This apologetic aims to win souls, not just arguments, and finds a common “grammar” with those who see things differently, promoting the Gospel with compassionate humility.¹³⁸

Similarly, on May 7, 2002, addressing the bishops of the Antilles, John Paul II stressed the importance of helping the faithful transition from a habitual to a conscious faith. He stated, “It is very important to develop a new apologetic in your local Churches so that the people can understand what the Church teaches and be able to justify their hope” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).¹³⁹

In addition to his intellectual vision, John Paul II also oversaw the completion of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a comprehensive guide to Catholic teaching. The Catechism did not just explain the doctrine, but emphasized the significance of faith in human life, demonstrating the apologetic anthropological-revelatory view. Again, John Paul II actively promoted dialogue with other religions, most notably at the 1986 Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace, where he invited leaders of various religions to pray together for peace. This act demonstrated the Church’s openness and showed how faith can contribute to universal values like peace and unity.

4.3. Maurice Blondel’s Contribution to the Anthropological-Revelatory Apologetics: Key Examples

Both John Paul II and Blondel supported an anthropological-revelatory approach to apologetics. Starting with the restless human heart, Blondel observed that humans always look for meaning in their existence. This human desire is an

¹³⁷ Roszak, “John Paul II’s Inspiration for Contemporary Apologetics,” 79–80.

¹³⁸ Cf. John Paul II, “Address to the Bishops of Western Canada of Their ‘Ad Limina’ Visit,” *The Holy See*, October 30, 1999, no. 6, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1999/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_30101999_ad-limina-west-canada.html.

¹³⁹ John Paul II, “Address to the Bishops of the Antilles on Their ‘Ad Limina’ Visit,” *The Holy See*, May 7, 2002, no. 4, accessed September 7, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2002/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020507_antille-ad-limina.html.

innate longing to ascend from the earth, inherently drawn to the Absolute, to God. In this sense, the existence of God is ascribed to the fact that man continually senses “something independent and definitive that stands outside the chain of phenomena, something real outside of the real, something divine.”¹⁴⁰ Latourelle observed that, for Blondel, “To be dissatisfied with the effect is to admit the superiority of the cause.”¹⁴¹

Blondel discovered that human action, whether consciously or not, wills the transcendent. This dynamism, seen most clearly in acts of sacrificial love, reaches out to the transcendent. It accounts for the fact that man is mysteriously accommodating to infinity, how the transcendent can be immanent without losing his finitude.

Thus, “It is through action that the divine takes hold in man, hides its presence there, and insinuates into him a new thought and a new life.”¹⁴² Consider the case of the soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his comrades. His act of volition goes beyond the confines of finitude. This desire for the infinite is something that cannot “be confused with the self or a psychological projection of human nature.”¹⁴³

By demonstrating how everyday actions implicitly aim at the transcendent, Blondel’s method suggests that human experience itself can be a witness to God. This approach encompasses a call to authenticity, a call to better recognize the transcendental aspects of one’s actions associated with their deeds, which leads far more effectively than defensive or purely deductive apologetics. In this way, Blondel reaffirms the traditional dogma of *gratia elevans*: nature is endowed with the supernatural (*gratia*), confirming once again that nature and the supernatural are united, though distinguished. His anthropological-revelatory perspective on apologetics profoundly influenced Vatican Council II.

Moreover, as a precursor to this new apologetics, Blondel reflected on the religious writings of Léon M. Ollé-Laprune, saying, “When a man has the faith, practices what he believes and embraces in reflection the whole meaning of his belief and his activity, then the circle is closed, there is no room for doubt, and the proof is complete.”¹⁴⁴ Blondel believed that the most effective apologetics

¹⁴⁰ Latourelle, *Man and His Problems in the Light of Jesus Christ*, 175.

¹⁴¹ Latourelle, 175.

¹⁴² Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, 380.

¹⁴³ Cf. John Cihak, “Threshold of Faith-Blondel & Apologetics,” Crossroads Initiative, July 2, 2016, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/threshold-of-faith-blondel-apologetics/>.

¹⁴⁴ Blondel, *The Letter of Apologetics & History and Dogma*, 140.

is one of “come, see and taste.”¹⁴⁵ True apologetics should not oppose thought and reality; instead, it should consider thought as emerging from life, in contact with the real, and preparing new forms of reality.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, apologetics should start from the simple, living, practical, immediate, and most accessible knowledge of life, rather than from abstract philosophical systems. Otherwise, “when the apologetics is rich in arguments, it risks forming individuals full of themselves, truly closed to the ways of divine grace. But the pity is that the grace cannot be reached due to their rational certainties and the moral satisfaction of spirits content with their own knowledge.”¹⁴⁷

This new apologetics transcends the reductionist explanations of human behavior that limit them to psychological or sociological factors. On the contrary, it argues for a holistic understanding that includes the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions — the metaphysical person is the concrete one. It integrates faith and reason by demonstrating that natural human inclinations and actions implicitly testify to a higher, transcendent reality. This acts as an apologetic equipment, suggesting that religious faith is not contrary to human nature but rather fulfills its most profound desires.

Conclusion

In the light of Pope John Paul II and Blondel, human action mirrors divine action. Humanity and divinity are integrated and united through practice and witness. Through this concrete witness, the light of Truth can break through even the densest clouds of doubt. It means that the most convincing words emerge from the deepest spirituality. These words are fascinating precisely because they are wholeheartedly believed and lived. The Gospel says, “When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say.” (Matt 10:19).¹⁴⁸

Faith, according to John Paul II, contains the rational essence that is simultaneously existential, ontological, epistemological, moral, and cultural. Reason, in turn, relies on faith for its maturation, purification, and elevation. Without the fundamental insights provided by faith, reason cannot fully function, even in the realm of science. John Paul II suggests that, on the one hand, contemporary

¹⁴⁵ Blondel, 140.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel*, 169.

¹⁴⁷ Blondel, *Esigenze filosofiche del Cristianesimo*, 74. My translation.

¹⁴⁸ *The New American Bible Revised Edition*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed December 27, 2024, <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/10>.

scientific theories, such as evolution, can enrich theological concepts like the *Imago Dei*. He underscores the need for theology to embrace insights from the philosophy of science, just as the cosmologies of the ancient Near Eastern world offered the insight for the first chapters of Genesis.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, scientists also need the existential and ultimate value and meaning to conduct their research. Theological wisdom, in this way, can help them go “beyond their reasonable and proper limits.”¹⁵⁰

Therefore, the conclusion of Pope John Paul II is, “Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish.”¹⁵¹

This new apologetics promotes a cooperative integration of faith and reason, philosophy and theology. It demands transcending speculative argumentation and embracing a broader, more dynamic vision — one grounded in rationality yet supernatural, like music, which operates within rational structures but conveys meaning beyond them.

Blondel’s insights on mystical experience clarify this approach. He distinguishes between “two different quests of the spirit”¹⁵²: one seeking rational clarity and the other embracing the mystery of spirituality. This dual approach underscores the needed balance between philosophical inquiry and spiritual longing. For Blondel, Jacob’s struggle with the Angel depicts the tension between philosophical demands and spiritual intuition, stressing the human yearning to grasp eternal truths that reside within.¹⁵³

For Blondel, mysticism is the “science of the saints,”¹⁵⁴ because it is authentic and has a profound union with God. Moreover, mysticism is a positive science¹⁵⁵ and could be analyzed critically. The knowledge that the saints possess is not

¹⁴⁹ John Paul II, “Letter to Reverend George V. Coyne, S.J., Director of the Vatican Observatory,” The Holy See, June 1, 1988, accessed December 27, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19880601_padre-coyne.html.

¹⁵⁰ John Paul II.

¹⁵¹ John Paul II.

¹⁵² Jean Giutton, “Maurice Blondel,” in *Annuaire de l’association amicale de secours des anciens élèves de l’Ecole normale supérieure*, posto come introduzione a M. Blondel – J. Wehrlé, *Correspondence*, éd. H. de Lubac (Paris, 1969), 12. Quoted in Domenico Bosco, “Introduzione: La Logica del Consentire; Blondel e la mistica,” in *Che cos’è la mistica?*, by Maurice Blondel, trans. Domenico Bosco (Morcelliana, 2011), 29. My translation.

¹⁵³ Bosco, 29.

¹⁵⁴ Bosco, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Maurice Blondel, *Che cos’è la mistica?*, trans. Domenico Bosco (Morcelliana, 2011), 169.

only rational but also mystical. To be more precise, a saint is a person who integrates faith and reason smoothly and harmoniously. As Blondel says,

The philosopher, who is not able of himself to discover it, to procure it, to experience it, does he not find it in himself nonetheless to ratify, to admire the perfection of spirit [of the mystical] according to the most essential idea, the most concrete possible that the spirit can have? And ought we not to conclude that in truth, according to the doctrine of St. John of the Cross, the mystic is the most reasonable of men?¹⁵⁶

From Blondel's point of view, mystical experiences, for example, have profound value beyond what we can observe with our natural eyes. Mystical experiences have intrinsic value that is not just empirical but also epistemological (related to knowledge), relational (involving relationships), ontological (pertaining to the nature of being), and profoundly religious.¹⁵⁷ Hence, mystical experiences aren't merely psychological occurrences and cannot be judged only on the basis of moral criteria.

Like music, mysticism reveals truths that logic can not fully express. To prove this point, Blondel cites Ludwig van Beethoven, who said music offers a deeper understanding than philosophy, and highlighted that some experiences go beyond what words and reason can explain.¹⁵⁸ When one pursues Truth, a specific effort must be made to move beyond rational thought. For example, mystical experiences can reveal insights about existence that transcend philosophical reasoning. Therefore, the essential task of philosophy is not to dominate or monopolize human experience but to leave room for mystery — knowing that one cannot know solely by reason. In this way, one could avoid immediate judgment and have more possibilities to enter into more profound realities. This insight serves as a foundational point for a new approach to apologetics.

The Blondelian shift¹⁵⁹ is also Pope Wojtyła's shift, or rather the Church's shift after the Vatican Council II. It underlines an anthropological-revelatory

¹⁵⁶ Maurice Blondel, "Le problème de la mystique," in *Qu'est-ce que la mystique?: Quelques aspects historiques et philosophiques du problème*, by Maurice Blondel, Victor Delbos, and Joannès Wehrlé (Bloud & Gay, 1925), 62–63. Quoted in Michael J. Kerlin, "Maurice Blondel: Philosophy, Prayer, and the Mystical," in *Modernists & Mystics*, ed. C. J. T. Talar (Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 68.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Blondel, *Che cos'è la mistica?* 180 ("Lettera di Blondel su Il problema del valore noetico dell'esperienza mistica"; 1925).

¹⁵⁸ Blondel, *Che cos'è la mistica?* 165.

¹⁵⁹ Baum, *Man Becoming*, 25.

approach that integrates faith and reason, while uniting daily lived experience with metaphysical truth. By doing so, it highlights the transcendental dimensions of human beings and offers an integrated understanding of human nature. This perspective shifts apologetics toward a model rooted in witness, testimony, and conversion rather than relying solely on abstract rational argumentation. Consequently, it is more accessible, connectable, and effective in addressing the existential questions and profound desires in human life. It offers a robust and compelling foundation for contemporary apologetics and reflects its complete actuality and relevance in today's context. As Pope Francis articulates in *Evangelii Gaudium*,

On the issue of credibility, a creative apologetic which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all. When certain categories of reason and the sciences are taken up into the proclamation of the message, these categories then become tools of evangelization; water is changed into wine. Whatever is taken up is not just redeemed, but becomes an instrument of the Spirit for enlightening and renewing the world.¹⁶⁰

In conclusion, this new apologetics argues for an integrated approach. It respects the depth of transcendental experience but never overlooks rational inquiry. A new apologetics could be applied by synthesizing the contributions of John Paul II and Blondel: one that addresses the intellectual, spiritual, and existential dimensions of human life, in order to win the soul instead of arguments.

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