

Maurice Blondel,
Social Catholicism,
& Action Française



Peter J. Bernardi



Maurice Blondel,
Social Catholicism,
& Action Française

*The Clash over the Church's Role in
Society during the Modernist Era*

The Catholic University of America Press
Washington, D.C.

To the Society of Jesus
with gratitude

Copyright © 2009
The Catholic University of America Press
All rights reserved

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum
requirements of American National Standards for Information
Science—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI
Z39.48-1984.
∞

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Bernardi, Peter J.

Maurice Blondel, social Catholicism, and action française : the
clash over the church's role in society during the modernist era /
Peter J. Bernardi.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8132-1542-6 (cloth : alk. paper) 1. Modernism
(Christian theology)—Catholic Church. 2. Church and the
world. 3. Blondel, Maurice, 1861-1949. 4. Descoqs, Pedro,
1877-1946. I. Title.

BX1396.B47 2009

282'.4409041—dc22 2008024379

Contents

Foreword by Rev. Joseph Komonchak vii

Acknowledgments ix

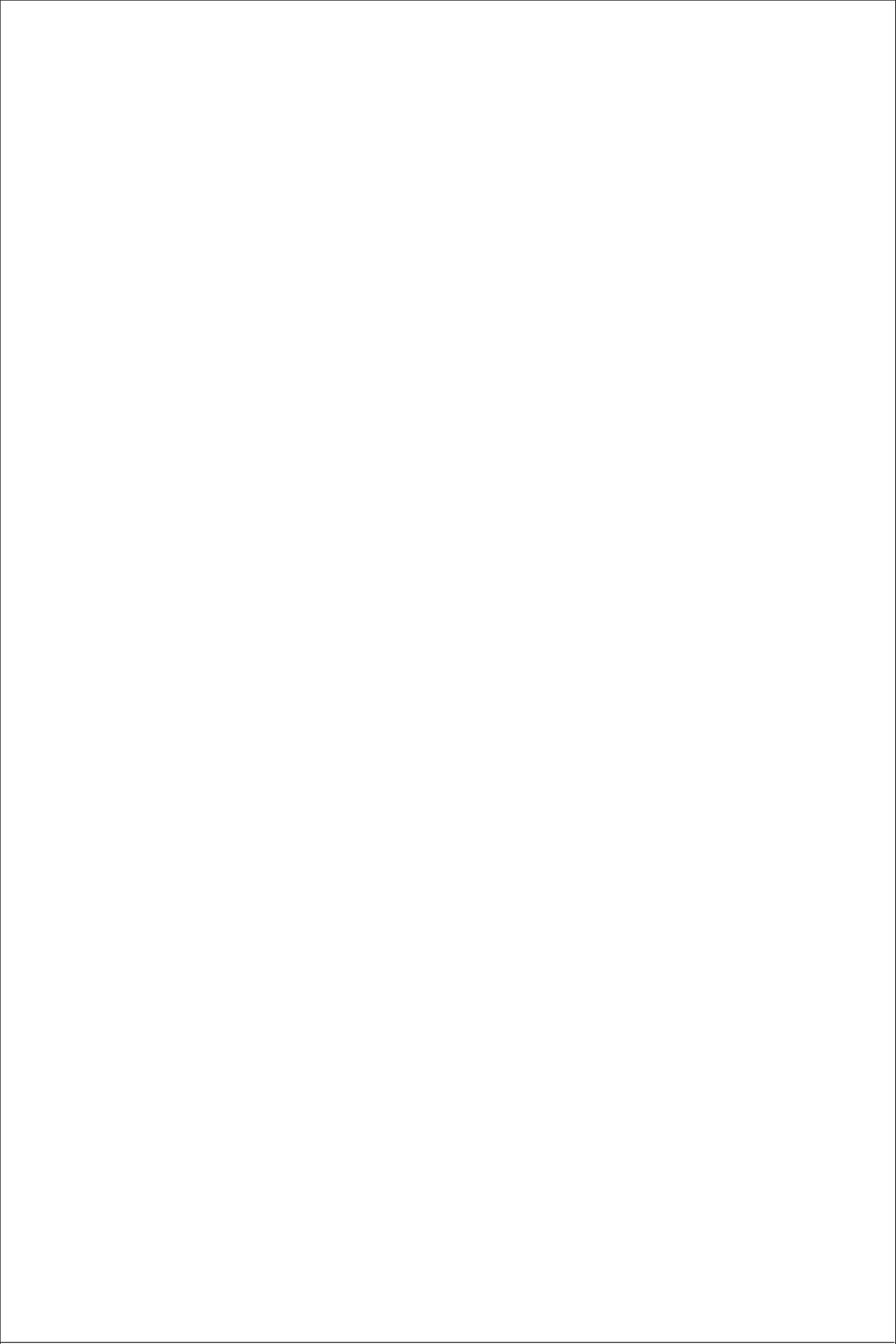
Abbreviations xi

Introduction i

1. The *Semaines sociales* under Attack:
Prelude to the “Testis” Series 7
2. The “Testis” Series 46
3. An Apology for an Alliance with a “Catholic Atheist” 89
4. The Poisonous Fruits of Monophorism 119
5. Round Two: Focus on the
Nature-Supernatural Relationship 145
6. Pedro Descoqs’s Second and Third Editions 174
7. Later Echoes 208
8. Assessing the Fundamental Issues 231

Selected Bibliography 269

Index 287



Foreword

Rev. Joseph Komonchak

Peter Bernardi's book sets out a controversy that divided Catholics in France in the first three decades of the twentieth century. At first sight, then, it could appear as of interest only to historians, who will greet it, I am confident, as an important contribution to the history of Catholic thought in the last century.

But the controversy analyzed and described addresses issues so basic in importance and so broad in implication that the work will also be read with profit by others outside of the historical guild. The controversy was about how the Catholic Church should respond to the several challenges of a modernity that had in some of its champions and in many of the areas under consideration almost defined itself by opposition not only to the Church's faith, indeed to faith in general, but also to the influence of religion in the public realms of economics, politics, and culture. How was the Church to respond?

The question arose in terms of what Bernard Lonergan called "the turn to the subject" in modern philosophy that in the place of metaphysics made analysis of human consciousness the starting point and ground of philosophy. Could one begin with Kant and not end in Kant's idealism or in some form of subjectivism? Or was modern philosophy to be dismissed, in the words of one neo-Thomist, as "the pathology of human reason"?

The question arose also in terms of the claims to autonomy made by the modern sciences—both the physical sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*).

How could a philosophy and a theology constructed largely on the premodern model of science make a case for itself as having something to say to the understanding of the world and, especially, to the understanding of the human historical project? To put the question in terms borrowed from Henri de Lubac: Was theology to be an understanding of *the faith*, of interest only to theologians, designed for internal consumption within the Church; or could it become an understanding of *the world* in the light of faith?

Finally, the question arose in terms of collective human action—with what human beings were doing and making with their freedom. Here, too, the modern world was claiming autonomy, insisting on freedom from religious and ecclesiastical authority. Were the Catholic doctrines of creation, original sin, and supernatural redemption dogmas to be accepted simply on the basis of divine and ecclesiastical authority, or did they have something essential to say to and about the human beings who in the modern period had assumed responsibility for themselves and for their individual and collective future? What room was there in the Catholic understanding of sin and grace for human freedom and autonomy? How was the Church to be an effective and redemptive force?

Explicitly or implicitly, such questions were the issues debated in the controversy on which this book focuses, between Maurice Blondel and Fr. Pedro Descoqs, S.J. The dispute has never been studied as comprehensively and with as much attention to detail as Peter Bernardi has done. He shows that the issues were more complex than has commonly been thought and that the assumption that Blondel was right on all issues largely begs the question and needs to be challenged. As much as the dispute was a product of its times, particularly with regard to “social Catholicism,” it retains a relevance for our own times. In different circumstances and in different terms the competing positions can be recognized in churchmen and theologians today. Anyone interested in the questions will benefit greatly from reading this book.

Acknowledgments

This study began as a dissertation project directed by Rev. Joseph Komonchak, assisted by Rev. Avery [now Cardinal] Dulles, S.J., and Rev. Peter Phan. I benefited enormously from their theological acumen. I am also grateful to the following scholars, in alphabetical order: Roger Aubert, Robert Bireley, S.J., Jeanne Caron, Jean Chélini, Pierre Colin, James Corkery, S.J., M. J. Coutagne, Roberto Dell'Oro, Étienne Fouilloux, John Galvin, †Joseph Gauvin, S.J., Dominique Gonnet, S.J., Daniel Huang, S.J., Philippe Lécivain, S.J., James Le Grys, Gustave Martelet, S.J., †Arthur McGovern, S.J., Joseph Mueller, S.J., Seamus Murphy, S.J., John O'Malley, S.J., †Carl Peter, William O'Brien, S.J., Christian Ponsen, Emile Poulat, Jacques Prévotat, †René Rémond, Peter Rogers, S.J., Michel Sales, S.J., David Schindler, John Sullivan, Michael Sutton, Christoph Theobald, S.J., Claude Troisfontaines, Pierre Vallin, S.J., and René Virgoulay.

My research was facilitated by the generosity of many archivists and librarians, especially Abbé Claude Troisfontaines, founder of the Centre d'Archives Maurice Blondel (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium) and Mlle Geneviève Mosseray, his executive assistant; Rev. Robert Bonfils, S.J., director of the French Province Jesuit Archives (Vanves, France); the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris, France); the Woodstock Library at Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.); and the Catholic University of America Library (Washington, D.C.). I am also grateful to Anne-Elisabeth Giuliani who reviewed my French translations and to my computer doctor Ted Slusarczyk.

The Woodstock Research Center (Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.) and its director, Gap Lo Biondo, S.J., and the Woodstock Library and its director, Leon Hooper, S.J., enabled the preparation of the manuscript for publication. I am also grateful to the Loyola University of New Orleans library staff, especially Patricia Doran and Ashley Pillow.

The revision of the original manuscript was facilitated by Edward Arroyo, S.J., Patrick Bourgeois, and John Farina. I am especially grateful to Paul Misner and Jared Wicks, S.J., for their helpful suggestions, and to Joseph Komonchak for contributing the preface.

I want to thank several people whose prayerful support and encouragement helped me to bring this project to completion: Hermina Beck, my mother, †Constance Bernardi, and my family, James P. Bradley, S.J., Edward Buvens, S.J., Jane Jacquemin-Clark, †Stephen Duffy, Bernie Owens, S.J., the Poor Clares, Stephen Rowntree, S.J., and my godmother, †Dr. Barbara Chaper.

Finally, my thanks to Philip Holthaus and to David McGonagle, Elizabeth Benevides, Tanjam Jacobson, Theresa Walker, and James Kruggel of the Catholic University of America Press who have been unfailingly helpful in preparing this book for publication. Many thanks!

Abbreviations

AF	Action Française
AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
APC/Annales	<i>Annales de philosophie chrétienne</i>
APFCJ	Archives de la Province de France de la Compagnie de Jésus
ASS	<i>Acta Sanctae Sedis</i>
“ATOCM”	“À travers l’oeuvre de M. Ch. Maurras” (the 1909 articles)
ATOM	<i>À travers l’oeuvre de M. Maurras</i> (the 1911 edition)
ATOCM	<i>À travers l’oeuvre de M. Ch. Maurras</i> (the 1913 edition)
BNFL	Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Laberthonnière
BV	Blondel-Valensin Correspondance
BLM	<i>Blondel et le modernisme</i>
BW	Blondel-Wehrlé Correspondance
CAMB	Centre d’Archives Maurice Blondel
CR	<i>Compte-rendu</i>
CSM	<i>Catholicisme sociale et monophorisme</i>

DAFC	<i>Dictionnaire apologétique de la foi catholique</i>
DS	<i>Denzinger-Schönmetzer</i>
ET	English Translation
FT	French Translation
LAHD	<i>The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma</i>
“MAF”	“Monophorisme et Action française” (the 1910 article)
MAF	<i>Monophorisme et Action française</i> (the 1913 monograph)
NPC	<i>Nationalism, Positivism, and Catholicism</i>
RSR	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>

Maurice Blondel,
Social Catholicism,
& Action Française