Maurice Blondel: Philosophy and Christianity

JOHN SIMONS

I. Introduction

To approach the thought of Maurice Blondel by an examination of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity, as presented in one of his major works, *La Philosophie et l'esprit chrétien*, is not to limit ourselves to a marginal aspect or one phase of his reflections. Rather, it is to seize the central issue of his thought. Blondel repeated many times that his original and permanent intention was to elaborate a philosophy which, in its autonomous movement, would open itself inevitably to the religious problem—the problem of human destiny. Moreover, Blondel judged as insufficient all attempts to attach Christianity to a philosophy already constituted outside Christian thought. " 'Up till now,' he wrote in 1886, 'little more has been done than to appropriate a pagan philosophy,' so that, 'there still is no such thing as a genuinely Christian philosophy, issuing from the Gospels.' "[1] In his estimation, the only philosophy which could accord itself with the gospel was one which had in some manner proceeded from it but which at the same time developed itself by a rational method, free from any of the presuppositions of faith.

The purpose of Blondel's thesis *L'Action*, which appeared in 1893, was precisely to construct such a philosophy. Later articles written in defence or illustration of that thesis represent further developments of Blondel's ideas regarding the possibility of a Christian philosophy. But the bond which he wished to establish between philosophy and Christianity was one which not only respected but assured the autonomy of the one and the transcendence of the other. Consequently, all his writings are, to a greater or lesser degree, marked by the same essential intention: to create a philosophy which by the logic of its rational movement will open itself to Christian faith without in any way imposing that faith.

This particular vision of the encounter of philosophy and Christianity had deep roots in the intellectual and cultural spheres not only of France but of Europe. In the years preceding and following the turn of this century Europe, and in particular France, was undergoing a political and cultural renaissance; it was the golden age of the Third Republic—the age of Proust, Péguy, Bergson, Duchesne and Loisy, Claudel and Gide, as well as Debussy

1. Maurice Blondel, "Carnets Intimes" (1894), quoted by Alexander Dru in *Maurice Blondel* (London: Harvill Press, 1964), p. 16.

and Ravel. In the history of the church it was the occasion of a revolution and renaissance as far-reaching and vigorous as the contemporary political and cultural renewal. Within the church, however, this revolution, this renewal of Catholic life and thought, this re-establishment of links with the culture of the time, was conditioned by the deep divisions which the problems of revivification engendered. Viewed superficially, this was an age characterized by a series of attempts at renewal, repressed by condemnations from Rome. But these episodes were merely symptomatic of a much deeper and more extensive renewal in the life of the church. This religious crisis was the result of centuries of sterility in honest scholarship, genuine art, and living thought within Catholicism. The conflict came as a consequence of the painful awakening of the church to its real situation which had been obscured for so long by political interests and philosophical short-sightedness. The heart of the problem was in fact the situation of the church in the modern world.

It was the Modernists in company with Blondel who came to play a major role in dealing with the underlying exegetical, philosophical, and theological themes. But, as Blondel himself observed, Modernism was not the cause of the crisis; rather, it was the effect.[2] In fact, it was largely as a reaction to a philosophy—namely, the impotent rationalism of nineteenth-century Scholasticism—incapable of dealing with new questions arising out of the scientific, cultural, and philosophical life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Modernism developed. Thus the stimuli for the growth of Blondel's philosophy included not only the internal impoverishment of Catholic imagination and thought, but also the contemporary objections to Christian faith. His purpose was apologetic; but it was through a purification of the religious sense and an integration of Catholic truth that this apology was to be accomplished.

The problem which was to occupy Blondel's life thus presented itself to him in the form of an opposition—a conflict between modern culture and Catholicism. On the one hand, modern thought considers the notion of immanence as the definitive condition of philosophy. The notion of immanence is perhaps best described as the idea that nothing can enter man's mind that has not come out of him and which does not correspond in some way to a need for development, ". . . and that there is nothing in the nature of historical or traditional teaching or obligation imposed from without which counts for him, no truth and no precept which is acceptable, unless it is in some sort autonomous and autochthonous."[3] Christianity, on the other hand, affirms the supernatural as that which is beyond the power of man to discover for himself and which is presented from the outside to man's thought and will.[4] The Christian supernatural thus constitutes a double scandal for philosophy. First, it is not authentic unless given from the outside and received by man. It is not found in us, nor can it issue from us. Secondly,

2. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 26.
3. M. Blondel, "Letter on Apologetics," in *ibid.*, p. 152.
4. Cf. *ibid.*

it is essential to man that he receive it. If he rejects it, he is lost forever. For

> . . . if we are to be Christians . . . we must admit that we are powerless to save ourselves, but powerful to ruin ourselves for ever, that we are incapable of purifying ourselves, but capable of sullying ourselves irremediably, and that the gift which is gratuitous and free in its source becomes for the subject of it inevitable and obligatory. . . .[5]

But what here presents itself as a formal incompatibility between philosophy and Christianity is also what makes the encounter possible. That is, there must be an indication in man and an echo in the most autonomous philosophy of this unconditional need for the supernatural. Blondel is, in effect, re-stating the problem in the form of an hypothesis: if the requirements of Christianity are justified, then there must be a trace in all men of this necessity of the supernatural. There must be, corresponding to this external obligation, an essential internal need and anticipation. If it is truly necessary that man accept the supernatural proclaimed by the Church, then this necessity must somehow be inscribed in his being. And if this necessity is found there, the man who reflects on the being of man, namely the philosopher, should be able to disclose it. Blondel's Christian philosophy is therefore concerned to show that Christianity alone satisfies all the artistic, intellectual, moral, and social requirements of mankind.

But in order to demonstrate the absolute necessity of Christian faith as the fulfilment of the deepest human aspirations, one must first define exactly the relationship between the natural order and the supernatural. If religion is not to be simply a philosophy and philosophy is not to be absorbed into religion, the proper realm of each must be clarified and brought into sharp focus.

In answer to certain contemporary but superficial attempts to resolve this problem, Blondel asserted that it was not enough simply to identify Catholicism with life, as if revelation only confirmed and fulfilled nature without bringing with it any new aspect or heterogeneous datum. From the premise that Catholicism satisfies all the aspirations of human nature, we can conclude only to its natural human truth. But if we take Christianity to be supernaturally true, then it is beyond the reach of our premises. Between these two orders, the natural and the supernatural, which do not simply coincide, there is a relationship other than a parallelism to be defined. For in such an account—that is, a parallelism—one can see neither what is lacking nor what remains to man without the supernatural. By the same token, one cannot see what prepares man for the supernatural, nor what effects the acceptance of the gift of grace and develops its fruitfulness within nature itself. Consequently, Blondel accepts the existence of thought and life without faith and grace, and looks for what is still present in the absence of the supernatural, in order to find there the principle according to which men may be prepared for the acceptance of the supernatural. It is in this context that Blondel attempts to construct a complete science which will

5. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

determine the problem of human destiny and will define all the various states and possible attitudes of man in the face of the decisive question, the hidden turning-point of his destiny. He hopes to develop a science which, through the rigour of its dialectic and the universality of its perspective, will possess probative force for all men in all times.

From the standpoint of philosophy, Blondel considers the doctrinal method of traditional apologetics to be quite inconsistent. The traditional case is summed up thus: Reason proves the existence of God. It is possible that he has revealed himself. History shows that he has done so, and also demonstrates the authenticity of the Scriptures and the authority of the church. Catholicism is thus established on a truly rational and scientific basis. The argument can be expressed in another way: The complete and harmonious account of the truth in its infinitely rich variety constitutes an excellent proof of the truth of Catholicism. When it is perfectly understood, it is its own demonstration. Therefore, for anyone who can grasp the powerful Thomistic synthesis, it is capable of arousing conviction. The crux of the problem, however, is found in the fact that the modern man, starting from incompatible premises, is not able to effect an entrance into the Thomistic system. In an era when metaphysical and theological ideas held power over men's minds, it was sufficient to begin from undisputed first principles in order to demonstrate the inner coherence of the truth, multiple in its aspects but basically one in its formal essence. The well-ordered system of Thomism does not, however, represent a final, definitive position for Blondel and his contemporaries. For one thing, it starts from principles which are disputed in modern times. As a synthesis of elements, it is an admirably harmonious inventory and co-ordination of every natural and supernatural object of knowledge and faith. But it presupposes a number of assertions which are now called into question, and it is not able to provide for the new requirements of minds which must be approached on their own ground. It is no use repolishing old arguments in order to present an object for acceptance when the subject is not disposed to listen. It is not divine truth which is at fault, but human preparation. Consequently the task of a subjective preparation for faith is of primary importance. It was to philosophy that Blondel assigned this primary function.

> Philosophy is like a first baptism of water, which prepares the way for the whole light, but which, by virtue of her positive results, gives rise to legitimate problems which she cannot resolve completely on her own. This work is indispensable to prepare the way for truths which could not be fully discovered by our reason alone, although placed in the presence of a revealed truth, reason finds there stimulating and nourishing clarity.[6]

In Scholasticism, the natural and supernatural orders were placed in an ascending hierarchy. There were, in effect, three zones on different levels: at the lowest, reason was in sole charge, while at the highest, faith alone

6. M. Blondel, *La Philosophie et l'esprit chrétien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), t. I, pp. xiif.

revealed the mysteries of the divine life; in between these two levels there was a meeting ground where reason discovered in an incomplete way the more important of natural truths which were further confirmed and explained by faith. As a consequence, these two orders—the natural and the supernatural—by bearing in on certain common objects came together without losing their identities. Hardly any thought was given, however, to examining in a critical spirit what might be called the subjective possibility or the formal compatibility of these two orders. This dualism thus emerges more as a statement of the problem than as a solution.

In violent reaction to Aristotelian and Scholastic intellectualism, Protestantism rejected the notion of a rational preparation for faith and tore down the whole construct of reason and freedom, only to re-establish it as an independent discipline. The respective orders of the natural and the supernatural, the realms of reason and faith, were therefore no longer arranged in an hierarchy. They were, in fact, juxtaposed without any possible communication or intelligible relation between them. They were to be united, if at all, only in the mystery of an individual's faith. The result of this Protestant reaction was that reason, being left as the only interpreter of the knowable world, claimed to find immanent in herself all the truths needed for the life of man. The realm of faith found itself totally excluded. Juxtaposition had led to incompatibility and opposition. In the face of this rationalism, which makes immanence the condition of all philosophy, Blondel asks whether in the only order remaining—that is, the natural—there does not appear a demand or necessity for the supernatural.

> If, then, doctrinal apologetics, in its old form, leaves intact the problem which seems to us today the very basis of religious philosophy, how is this problem to be put, by what method is it to be approached? What can be said on a subject of such complexity and delicacy which will strike home and remain strictly philosophical?[7]

La Philosophie et l'esprit chrétien is representative of Blondel's attempt to provide a solution to the problem which we have just enunciated. In the course of our examination of two of the major themes of that work—the philosophical enigma of God and the problem of contingency—the relationship between philosophy and Christianity, as envisaged by Blondel, will become clearer. Our study will reveal philosophical reflection as articulating certain universal problems which inevitably arise out of the facts of human existence. In attempting to explicate these "difficulties," philosophy discovers various requirements which have bearing on the issues, she analyzes data and thus supplies the organization of the problems. But in her endeavour to resolve these problems completely, philosophy is met by antinomies and obscurities which, far from clarifying the issue in question, only lead to further perplexities and contradictions. Once philosophy recognizes that she is faced by an enigma, an insurmountable obstacle which reason cannot resolve at her own level, the path is open for revelation, which

7. Blondel, "Letter on Apologetics," p. 150.

raises our reason to new and fruitful insight, but always remains impenetrable in its mystery. These revealed mysteries in turn lead to further difficulties which cannot be fully understood except in the light of a new mystery. Thus the whole Christian revelation emerges as an organic totality in interpenetration with philosophy. This intimate relation of reciprocal autonomy, in its unique organization, cannot be fully defined or justified by comparison with facts drawn from physical, biological, psychological, or ethical reality. It is *sui generis*, a new synthesis described by Blondel as "l'union théandrique."

II. The Philosophical Enigma of God and the Christian Mystery of the Trinity

At the beginning of his examination of the concrete, particular problems of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity, Blondel points to a secret, ineradicable inquietude which is present in all our thought, science, and action. To be sure, this inquietude or anxiety (*inquiétude*) pervades the total impulse of our human aspiration. Never permitting us to remain inert, it always propels us toward an end. The fact of this movement toward an end finds expression in certain philosophical formulae, which from the moment they are grasped in their complexity are, it is claimed, incontestable. Thus Scholastic philosophy asserts that every agent acts in view of an end: "omne agens agit propter finem." Moreover, this end presents itself to the agent, deceptively or not, as a good which he acquires, rightly or wrongly, for his own good. That is why it can be said that the notion of a final end, to which all knowledge and value-appreciation refers itself, as to an absolute standard, is a supreme good, a *summum bonum*, without which nothing would be either conceivable or capable of being grasped by our moral consciousness. The significance of this universal inquietude is found, therefore, in the fact that it lies at the source of all our action, thought, and evaluation, driving us toward an end in which the reflective imagination discovers an implicit final end which has the character of a supreme good. This final end or supreme good is, in its turn, the absolute standard of all knowledge and value. It is, in effect, the cornerstone on which both science and morality are built.

If a point of reference is everywhere required, not only for the possibility of the sciences but also for morality and metaphysics, even this idea of a finite reference-point or working hypothesis, be it arbitrarily chosen or not, presupposes the superior idea of that which serves to measure all and to relate all to a universal mean. This universal mean may itself be the Unity of all things or the Absolute Perfection. Blondel does not as yet become involved in any discussion of the exact ontological status of this universal mean; he is merely saying that the moral life, scientific investigation, and metaphysical speculation presuppose an ultimate standard of reference,

without which they would not be possible. The point to be made here is that the very existence of science, metaphysics, and morality, the fact that man is a knowing, acting, and evaluating creature, necessitates the hypothesizing of some absolute reference or standard. This hypothetical absolute is not and cannot be identified with the Christian revelation of God, but the fact that it is spoken of as the unity of all things, the ultimate standard of reference implied in all human projects, is sufficient reason for Blondel to equate it with the basis of the philosophical notions of "God." In this way, the problem of God poses itself imperiously to every man possessing reason and conscience. This God, however, is as yet indeterminate. It is only in the attempt to purify and understand the primordial idea of God that philosophy is brought to recognize its own inadequacy and limitations. At the same time, philosophy has an obligation to inquire into and make explicit this problem, which presents itself more or less obscurely to all men. In effect what Blondel is saying is that, because man's mode of being in the world is what it is, the problem of God inevitably poses itself to all men. Philosophically, this problem is expressed in the hypothesis of an absolute perfection or unity to which all human thought, action, and value ultimately relates itself.

Blondel's method involves an initial acceptance of all the conceivable attitudes, be they the most extreme in negation or affirmation, which men assume when faced with the question of God. For whether they realize it or not, whether they want it so or not, every position taken up by men with respect to the problem of God implies reference to a fixed standard, which in fact makes possible the appropriation of a position, be it one of doubt, indifference, or affirmation.

If, as Descartes asserted, the idea of the Infinite or Absolute is at once the most fundamental and the most fertile of scientific principles, the notion of the transcendent or divine is, according to Blondel, also included and equally inviscerated (*inviscérée*), so to speak, in all philosophical thinking. All that remains for the philosopher, then, is to determine the compatible elements which will render conceivable and affirmable this implicit idea of the divine. The diversity of doctrines which attempt to explicate this basic but indeterminate idea of God offer a variable and always deficient content. The very plurality of metaphysical systems of God is proof enough that our knowledge in this area is always inadequate. But this is not to say that the natural reason remains impotent or disabled, and that no proof which it may offer is useful or valid. For, as Blondel concludes, it is true to say that the "God" known to philosophers offers a double certainty: (1) "it" is, in the full sense of the word *to be*, and (2) in "its" aseity, it is outside our grasp, impenetrable by any finite intelligence. But we must take note of the use of the neutral "it" in this context. Our affirmation of God does not reveal God to us; for it (the affirmation) remains extrinsic to its object (God). At the level of reason we can know only that "God" is. Therefore, we conclude that God can be known and must be affirmed as certain and

concretely real. At the same time, "it" cannot be penetrated. ". . . Dieu peut être connu et doit être affirmé comme certain et concrètement réel . . . mais, en même temps, il ne peut être pénétré en son secret. . . ."[8] Consequently, we are not to be surprised at the difficulties which reason encounters from the moment she attempts to analyze and dissect the idea of this God, which is perfect and incommensurable with our experience and discursive ways of knowing. But the philosopher must renounce all theosophy and presumption and, without abandoning naturally acquired certainty, he must make explicit and subject to rational scrutiny the insufficiencies of anthropomorphic conceptions, which would misrepresent or pervert the spontaneous faith of humanity. Thus Blondel sets himself to an examination of the purification and explication of the various philosophical concepts of God. In the course of this examination, Blondel demonstrates the internal inconsistencies in every rational concept of God, and the ultimate failure of reason to resolve the problems to which she herself gives rise in her attempts to understand and explain the original apprehension of the transcendent. Leibniz is cited as one philosopher who had a lively sense of this disjunction between the certainty of the traditional proofs of God's existence and the contradictions which arise out of entirely theoretical speculation. The scandal of evil and the obscurity of the divine judgment led him, in his *Théodicée*, to attempt to exonerate God from all reproach. But before proving and affirming the reality of God, Leibniz establishes his possibility, by demonstrating that there is no internal contradiction in the concept of a necessary connection between the ideas of perfection and existence. For Blondel, however, this is only a conceptual and anthropomorphic solution, which ignores the concrete reality of a God who unifies absolutely in his simplicity all the attributes which reflective reason is led to recognize in him.

Starting from the rough outlines of religion and superstition, there is a rational movement and development which carries intellectual, moral, and spiritual culture to the affirmation of pure monotheism. But even a pure, dry monotheism gives rise to difficulties and internal contradictions, as Blondel demonstrates in indicating the profound incoherence, from the perspectives of both the pure and practical reason, of certain associated attributes which, from our viewpoint, seem mutually exclusive.

Even as the affirmative of God leads to countless difficulties in the realm of speculative reason, so does this God of reason leave unsatisfied our deepest spiritual yearning. Here it is no longer a matter of an abstract or verbal difficulty but of a vital and religious one, involving not only our human faculties but all the divine attributes, whose multiplicity is only a poor image of that which we are seeking to represent of the absolute divine simplicity.

But no matter by what path reason attempts to approach the concept of God and make it more understandable, she is faced by antinomies and obscurity. The requirements of critical reason draw her irresistibly to exhaust herself and to render God unthinkable. Thus the problem of God becomes

8. Blondel, *La Philosophie et l'esprit chrétien*, t. I, p. 4.

the great philosophical enigma. At the same time, however, philosophy is made ready to find in the Christian revelation the only means of saving God from all metaphysical and moral impossibility. When philosophy recognizes that it is confronted with an insurmountable obstacle, with obscurities which cannot be resolved at the level of natural reason, where they only multiply themselves, the Christian revelation of the Trinity emerges as a mystery infinitely and definitively soothing to the reason, which had vainly sought, at her own level, to satisfy her need for coherence, but in the process had been lost in impenetrable darkness. But revelation not only furnishes reason with an answer to the philosophical enigma of God; at the same time it provides her with the fundamental principle which will govern subsequent investigations into the mysteries of the creation and of the supernaturalization of man.

The triune God of Christian revelation, being no mere theoretical construction, but rather a life of intimate love, eternally creative, perfect in felicity, offers to reason an answer to the difficulties to which the multiplicity of characteristics gave rise in the abstract realm of philosophy. But this revelation is at the same time a mystery characterized by what Blondel calls the "clair-obscur"—that is, by both clarity and obscurity. The word "mystery" signifies a revealed truth which the human spirit, left to its own resources, would not have been able to discover and to specify with certainty. Once revealed, a mystery remains impenetrable in its depths. But it is not without significance, being a speculative and practical teaching which, in the clear-obscure area where reason and faith co-operate, permits us not only to know, but also to achieve, our true and entire destiny. According to Blondel, the alliance of two contradictory terms, clear and obscure, in a single word, associates two types of knowledge (*connaissance*) which, far from being alien to one another, are complementary without being confused. The different orders wherein these two kinds of knowledge are operative are those in which, alternately, the clarity of rational theses leads to obscurity and the obscurity of revealed mysteries offers luminous insight into the intellectual enigmas and an issue out of the impasse in which our reflections, left to themselves, vainly attempt to find understanding. Blondel therefore concludes: ". . . the triune God (*le Dieu trine et un*) is, we come to see, the only and absolute answer which soothes, vivifies, exalts the religious anguish (*angoisse*) to a contemplation as satisfying to the intelligence thirsting for clarity as to the yearning which is at once spiritual and mystical."[9]

Having fixed the unbreakable point of attachment, the mystery of mysteries, the generating principle from which the whole sequence of subsequent truths will unfold, Blondel moves on to a new level in the encounter between philosophy and revelation. He will now undertake to demonstrate that the Trinity can and must become the exemplar, the supreme goal, of our destiny, even in spite of the obstacles which present themselves to us in the movement of our human life to its final assimilation into the life of the

9. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Trinity, according to St. Paul's dictum: "For me to live is Christ." That is the Christ who said of himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

III. The Philosophical Enigma of Contingency and the Meaning of the Mystery of the Creation

The relief which is brought to philosophy by the "clair-obscur" of the revelation of the Trinity is far from being a definitive appeasement. For, once our reason apprehends the mystery of the eternal and necessary God, who has revealed himself as that which cannot not-be, she is led to a subsequent problem so vast and important that it involves the whole universe and its *raison d'être*. But this question does not arise only within the context of revelation. The enigma presents itself to the natural reason as well, but outside the pale of the Christian revelation the problem is approached from a different direction. In any event, it is presented to both believer and non-believer.

The dilemma finds expression in the metaphysical question: How and why does this world, characterized by contingency, exist outside, as it were, the omnipotence and divine wisdom and goodness of God? Is there a matter or a nothingness co-eternal with Absolute Being? Must our reason oscillate between a dualism and a monism, neither of which resolves the multiple difficulties raised by critical reflection? But the problem contains a further enigma: How is reason to explain the compatibility of this world, in its multiple forms of existence, with the supreme end of Christianity: "that they all may be one"? Thus, in attempting to justify the co-existence of Being-in-itself, which is fully sufficient, with contingent beings, reason is brought to an impasse on two levels.

On one hand, it appears that God is all Being and that his absolute plenitude leaves no emptiness, no lack, no nothingness. Being is, that is all; there is no place in him or outside him (if that were imaginable) which could be, or which (by virtue of his perfect fulness) would merit becoming. Rational speculation has been perplexed by this insoluble problem from ancient times (Parmenides and Plato) to modern (Lachelier and Bergson). Either the equivocal refrain has been "non-being is not," or there has been a subtle attempt to attribute a shadow of existence to this pseudo-concept of nothingness.

On the other hand, how are we to conceive of the God of perfection and infinite charity, who in his blessed intimacy has need of no outside worship or adoration—how are we to conceive of him as creating imperfect beings which, in their irremediable powerlessness, will never be able to achieve perfection? Taking into account the infinite disproportion between the created and the Uncreated, is it not absurd to speak of a relation of love existing between the two?

If there can be no justification of the contingent order, should we not,

following the example of Parmenides, deny the authentic reality of these imperfect existents, which are both deceived and deceiving? We must conclude either to the non-being of God or to the illusory character of the world. But God is that which cannot not-be. Faced by this apparently insoluble alternative, nihilism and pessimism in their various expressions, to a greater or lesser degree despairing of any deliverance, grovel in their own anguish and show an unhealthy preoccupation with nothingness. But to Blondel, this is a cry of cosmic suicide: ". . . as if by this lofty and extravagant resignation one could make room for God!"[10]

On the other hand, a benign optimism does not reach the heart of the problem. According to Blondel, this attitude finds philosophical expression as early as Plato: God is good and, since he is without desire, he has no need; therefore, he pours out the goodness which is his. But, for Blondel, this solution risks attributing to God a spontaneously radiative nature like that of a physical source of heat. There would be, in this case, no room for any truly free generosity on the part of God. Moreover, God does not have a nature in the same way that contingent realities do. He does not possess a distinct essence of his being, for he has revealed himself as: "I am who I am" or "I am he who is." As he does not come into being, he is not, nor does he submit to or undergo, a nature of which he would be the subject, and which would be interior to his proper existence.

By virtue of this dialectical movement, philosophy is eventually brought to recognize that it can offer no satisfactory solution to the problem with which it is confronted, namely, the justification of the contingent order. Reason is overthrown in her attempts to explain the co-existence of Being-in-itself with contingent beings, either by the internal inconsistencies of her pseudo-solutions, or by their incompatibility with the data of revealed truths.

And so it is that philosophy is once again presented with an enigma, an insurmountable obstacle which cannot be resolved by critical reflection. At this point, the revelation of the mystery of the creation appears on the scene as supplying an initial appeasement to our reason, which up till now has been searching for a theoretical justification of the world. In the mystery of creation, she is given rather a living, spiritual explanation of the reality of the universe. Blondel remarks that it is a notable fact that, outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition, no true doctrine of creation has ever been elaborated. Without the help of revelation there could, it seems, be no pure idea of a creation, in the sense of a calling into being by divine fiat. For one thing, human knowledge, always depending on experience and sensible imagery, has never been able to represent an absolute beginning, a creation *ex nihilo*. Consequently, the natural reason has instinctively been unable to accept such a notion. A further objection to the creation, very much in evidence in modern times, has little to do with mental habits arising out of sensible experience or scientific connections, but rather involves a profound awareness of the imperfection of the world—an imperfection that appears

10. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

more as a failure on God's part than as a manifestation of goodness, all-wise and omnipotent.

Philosophy once more endeavours to resolve these objections to the mystery of the creation. But the various answers to these metaphysical and moral objections only lead to further difficulties, which reason, left to herself, cannot eliminate. Moreover, the philosophical solutions to these problems are finally shown to be inconsistent with the Christian revelation of God. Consequently, the dilemma to be resolved does not concern a nothingness which is not, nor does it involve, as in Leibniz's scheme of things, possibilities and essences which would have in themselves an intrinsic propensity to realization. The force of the enigma has now shifted to the need for a justification of the creation, that is, a justification which would be worthy of its Author, the perfect, loving Trinity. Here again, philosophy is found inadequate to the task. If God created, it must have been for an end which would be compatible with his perfection and charity. The creation then must be directed to an end. But this end cannot be accessible to philosophy, which works only on the critical and reflective level and cannot penetrate the being and the purpose of God. Reason cannot fill out the programme, as it were, of the divine "explanation" for calling a contingent universe into existence. In the end, reason must resort to the scriptural revelation of the incarnation and redemption, in order to find there the final end of man, namely his adoption through Christ into the divine life of the Trinity, as a son of God. The mystery of creation therefore does not find its full meaning except in a new mystery, that of the supernatural vocation of spiritual creatures. If the universe was created, it was created to realize a free and supreme design of love; and that divine purpose is disclosed in the asymptotic divinization of man. The creation itself implies a superior destiny. Since such a destiny is assigned us, a positive revelation, namely, that of the creation, was "necessary" in order to make us explicity aware of this reality. But the mystery of our adoption as sons of God cannot be comprehended except in the light of the mystery of the incarnation and the redemption. Thus, in Blondel's scheme, the whole edifice of faith—the mysteries of the Christian revelation —emerges not only as supplying the necessary requirements of reason in the dialectical movement of the intelligible structure of human thought, action, and evaluation, but also as moving beyond philosophy and bringing with it new data which must be dealt with in turn on a new level.