

Concilium 79). This proviso has been implemented in the Book of Blessings, which provides both clerical and lay blessings in various contexts. Thus, the Book of Blessings contains blessings to be used within a domestic setting (e.g. the blessing of children, of the family, of food, of the Advent wreath in a home).

The Roman Pontifical contains those blessings and consecrations either strictly reserved to the bishop or whose ordinary minister is the bishop. The Roman Ritual contains those blessings given by the priest either as an ordinary minister or as an extraordinary minister delegated by the bishop or by special indult. Traditionally, there were three types of reserved blessings in the Roman Ritual: (1) those reserved to bishops and other Ordinaries and to priests with special faculties; (2) blessings given by priests having an apostolic indult; and (3) blessings proper to certain religious communities (Chapter XI). The 1964 *Inter oecumenici*, Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy permits all priests to bestow the majority of these blessings. The recent revision of the sacramental and other liturgical rites has also extended to priests certain blessings once reserved to the bishop. Thus in case of necessity any priest may bless the oil used in the Anointing of the Sick. The 1977 Rite of a Dedication of a Church and Altar allows the priest to consecrate a chalice or paten.

Blessings given by the deacon have also been extended. "It pertains to the office of a deacon, in so far as it may be assigned to him by competent authority, to administer Baptism solemnly, to be custodian and distributor of the Eucharist, in the name of the Church to assist at and to bless marriages, to bring Viaticum to the dying . . . to administer sacramentals, and to officiate at funeral and burial services" (*Lumen gentium* 29). Thus the deacon, whether permanent or transitional, may give the blessings contained in these sacramental rites. When he is an ordinary minister for the exposition of the Eucharist, he may bless the people with the Sacrament. He may also preside at the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours and bestow its concluding blessing.

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[L. J. JOHNSON/J. R. QUINN/EDS.]

BLONDEL, MAURICE

French Catholic philosopher; b. Nov. 2, 1861, Dijon; d. June 4, 1949, Aix-en-Provence.

L'Action. Blondel established himself as a philosopher in French university circles with a ground-breaking

dissertation on *Action* in 1893, in which he crashed through two intellectual barriers common at the time: the confining of philosophy to a consideration of abstract ideas and the exclusion of religion from the scope of legitimate philosophical inquiry. Starting from the question, does human life make sense and does the human being have a destiny?, he argued for a strict necessity of raising the philosophical question of action (vs. dilettantism), a strict necessity of answering it in positive terms (vs. pessimism), and a strict necessity of considering it in subjective as well as objective terms (vs. positivism).

Through critical reflection on the origin of action in consciousness, Blondel distinguished between a willed will, which focuses on determinate objects of willing, and a willing will, which entails an infinite power of willing in search of an object that will be the equal of this power. From this he argued that it is necessary that the will go out of itself into the body, into co-action with others, to the very confines of the universe in search of an object that will be the equal of its infinite power. He showed how, in superstitious action, the will tends to attribute such an infinite value to certain things in the immanent order of human experience, whether it be a totem, a ritual, or even its own subjectivity.

From this reflection on the total phenomenon of action and from his criticism of superstition Blondel came to a twofold conclusion: that it is necessary for action to go out beyond its own immanent order and that it is impossible for it to do so left to its own resources. Hence he argued for the necessity of affirming a totally transcendent Necessary Being and for the necessity of coming to a choice in the face of this Necessary Being. The human being ultimately wants to be God. The choice is to be God with God or to be God without God. Both alternatives have consequences: in the former case, finding fulfillment of one's most intimate desire; in the latter, being totally deprived of any fulfillment. At the core of every human action lies this option which denotes a properly religious attitude, whether for or against God.

In this necessary religious attitude, however, philosophy can only grasp the necessity of saying yes or no to God, not the content of what God might will on His part or how He might choose to fulfill the human being's desire. This is why philosophy cannot replace religion, which has to be from God. Philosophy understands action only from the human standpoint. If it tries to replace religion in answering the question of how human destiny can ultimately be fulfilled, it becomes another form of superstition or immanentism. Philosophy may nevertheless still entertain the idea of a fulfillment that would be strictly from God and yet fulfilling according to the exigencies of human action. Hence the idea of the supernatural is hy-

pothetically necessary for philosophy. As supernatural it is not bound by any necessity of nature in human action. It depends totally on God's free initiative, which ever remains a mystery for philosophy. Yet, if such an initiative is taken by God, even if it be supernatural, it becomes obligatory for human being or necessary as a condition of fulfillment. One cannot say no to it without going against one's most fundamental human desire.

Controversy. In *L'Action* Blondel went directly to the question of the supernatural as obligatory or necessary for man, as this had always been understood in the Catholic tradition, without passing through any idea of natural religion, which he regarded as another form of superstition based on abstract metaphysical concepts fabricated by man. He managed to convince his examiners of the philosophical validity of his argument, even though they were reluctant to accept any of his conclusions with regard to the necessity of supernatural religion and consequently to grant him status in the university.

On the other hand, Blondel ran into trouble in Catholic circles because he criticized the standard approaches to religion in apologetics as inadequate and as failing to get to the essential point of religion as something supernatural or free on the part of God and yet as necessary or obligatory on the part of human being. It was important for Blondel to show that this was a matter of philosophy and not just a matter of religious conviction, as too many French Catholic apologists supposed at the time. With this end in view he wrote a series of articles in 1896, while he was still looking for a post in the university, under the heading of a *Letter on the Exigencies of Contemporary Thought in the Matter of Apologetics and on the Method of Philosophy in the Study of the Religious Problem*. It reassured many of his stance as a philosopher but also antagonized many Catholics who began to realize that Blondel was not defending their particular conception of religion.

Thus Blondel found himself in a philosophical no-man's land, having to show that his philosophy of religion was indeed a philosophy and not a theology, and having to defend himself against the misunderstanding of those believers who could not accept what appeared to them as an illegitimate intrusion on the part of philosophy into a realm reserved for faith or mysticism. Eventually he was accepted by the university and received the chair in philosophy in Aix-en-Provence (where he spent the rest of his academic career and came to be known as the Philosopher of Aix), but he was left with the problem of having to explain himself in the matter of Christian apologetics and to defend himself against attacks from those Catholics who had no concern with meeting the exigencies of contemporary thought.

Blondel spent the first fifteen years of his career at Aix, from 1898 until World War I, doing battle on two fronts, one with philosophers like BRUNSCHVICG and BERGSON, whose idealism or intuitionism he could not agree with, and the other with mainly theologians who also claimed to be philosophers, at least in the matter of apologetics. Many did try to have his work put on the Index of Forbidden books, during the time of the Modernist crisis, but they did not succeed. Blondel was among the first to spot the problem of MODERNISM and to write against it in an important article on *History and Dogma* in 1904. The article reemphasized the importance of tradition as something living in the Church and opened the way to a more positive discussion of development in dogma.

Later Philosophical Work. Blondel's interest was always philosophy, not theology nor even apologetics as such. Even while he was addressing the problem of apologetics he published a number of important articles in dialogue with Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Pascal, etc., in which he discussed problems in the philosophy of religion. Early in his career he conceived of a grandiose project in philosophy that would set forth his thought in a more complete way than he had been able to do within the constraints of his dissertation on *Action*, for he was not satisfied with being thought of as only a philosopher of action. He worked on this project, which was clearly outlined in his mind under the three headings of *Thought, Being, and Action*, during most of his teaching career, but he was unable to publish any of it before he had to retire from his Chair in Philosophy in 1927 for reasons of blindness. It was only then, under the handicap of blindness, that he was able to complete what he thought of as his philosophical legacy with the collaboration of his faithful and devoted secretary, Nathalie Panis.

In the early 1930s Blondel published several articles on Augustine, on the occasion of the 1500th anniversary of the saint's death. He insisted on the philosophical import of Augustine as a Catholic thinker. This provoked a reaction against the idea of Christian philosophy, not only among non-Christians, but also among many Catholics like Etienne GILSON and most Thomists at the time. Blondel defended this idea of Catholic philosophy at some length because he saw that his own philosophy was at stake in it in the same way as his own original philosophy of action had been at stake in the refusal to consider religion as a philosophical problem. He still had a long struggle to organize his thoughts on paper, since he could no longer read the copious notes he had written over the years for the project. Family and friends tried to help, but only when Mlle Panis finally came on the scene in December 1931, did things begin to fall into place. Five volumes followed in quick succession between 1934 and

1937, two on *Thought*, one on *Being*, and two more on *Action*. Blondel also had in mind a three-volume work on *Philosophy and the Christian Spirit*, two volumes of which appeared before his death while the third remained unfinished. On the day before he died he signed a contract for another volume of essays written earlier on the *Philosophical Exigencies of Christianity*, bringing out once again certain Catholic dimensions of philosophy that should not be overlooked.

Above all Blondel was a philosopher, something he insisted on all his life, even in the midst of his controversies over apologetics, but a philosopher who had a tremendous positive influence in Christian theology as well as philosophy, not only in France but in many other countries as well, especially Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and Latin America, where his work has long existed in translation. He has also been translated into Japanese and English, albeit at a later date.

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[O. BLANCHETTE]

BLONDIN, MARIE-ANNE SUREAU, BL.

Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Anne; baptized as Marie Esther Blondin; b. April 18, 1809, Terrebonne, Quebec, Canada; d. Jan. 2, 1890 at the motherhouse of Lachine near Montreal. Born to the poor, illiterate farmers Jean-Baptiste Blondin and Marie-Rose Limoges, Esther learned to read and write in her 20s while a domestic, then boarder, at the local convent of the Notre Dame Sisters. She began her novitiate there but was forced to leave due to ill health in 1833. During her tenure as a parochial school teacher in Vaudreuil, she came to understand that the Church mandate for sexually segregated education contributed to the high rate of illiteracy, especially among girls. In 1848, she sought and received permission from Bp. Ignace Bourget to found a religious congregation to establish coeducational country schools. Blondin became the first mother superior of the six sisters of St. Anne at its founding (Sept. 8, 1850), although she was asked to resign on Aug. 18, 1854 due to a conflict with the community's chaplain, Fr. Louis-

Adolphe Marechal. Under obedience to the bishop, she refused to accept re-election in 1854, 1872, and 1878. For a time she was directress of the St. Geneviève Convent, until recalled in 1858 to the motherhouse at St. Jacques de l'Achigan (now St. Jacques de Montcalm near Joliette). There and at Lachine (to which the motherhouse was transferred in 1964) she was served as laundress (1859–1890). She was a continual example to her community of charity and humility, punctuated by her request to make her final confession to and forgive her persecutor, Fr. Marechal. Blondin's cause was opened in 1950 by Abp. Paul-Émile Leger. She was declared venerable (May 14, 1991) and beatified (April 29, 2001) by Pope John Paul II.

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[K. I. RABENSTEIN]

BLOOD, RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF

“Blood” is from a Germanic root with the basic meaning of “bloom.” The Greek term αἷμα, in the sense of something which “arouses awe or reverence,” belongs much more closely to the vocabulary of religion (see “Blut,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. T. Klauser, 2:459).

In Mythology. In Norse myths, the *skalds* characterize blood as an intoxicant on the basis of the myth of Odin's drink of the poets (*Edda, Skáldskaparmál* 27). Blood itself is not personified, probably because, unlike water, it did not appear prominently as a great natural force or power. However, it was brought into numerous mythical relations with other things, and especially with the sun. In Egypt Ra (the Sun) was said to have originated from drops of blood. The association, blood and fire, is self-evident, but in Mexico it plays an especially significant role in Aztec religion. On the other hand, the blood of menstruation turned the imagination to the moon. The Bambuti, for example, call menstrual blood “moon-blood” [P. Schebesta, *Die Bambuti. Pygmäen* (4 v., Brussels, 1938–50) 3:190]. Practically the same idea is present in the Egyptian hieroglyph signifying the blood of Isis. Since this blood was shed to restore the dead Osiris to life, there is a clear association here of blood and life. The ideas of the connection between blood, fertility, and earth are firmly anchored in ancestor-worship. A Papuan group has a myth in which this combination is associated with that of blood and fire. Belief in the vampire is not found in this complex. It has perhaps a special origin,