I would like to open by thanking those of you who have made my transition to Santa Barbara so easy and enjoyable. Here at the university, I would like to thank the many faculty who have enthusiastically embraced the idea of Catholic Studies; the faculty, staff, and students in Religious Studies who have welcomed me and helped me settle in, and above all my department chair, Cathy Albanese, who has been an unfailing source of advice and counsel. The Catholic community has been equally welcoming: Bishop Curry, Fr. Virgil and the Friars at the Mission, Fr. Joe and entire community at St. Mark’s have all gone out of their way to help me feel at home. Above all, though, I want to thank the two people who not only welcomed me with open arms but also epitomize for me the spirit of the lay Catholic community here in Santa Barbara – Charles and Harriet Burke. As many of you know, Chuck has been having health problems and I am grateful that he could be here today. I’d like to dedicate this lecture to Chuck and Harriet.

The directions – if you will -- that came with the chair in Catholic Studies say that the chair “is expected to guide a comprehensive program … that will advance scholarship in Catholic studies … in a department that values interdisciplinary and comparative approaches to the study of religion.” Given the strength of the Religious Studies Department, we have an unparalleled opportunity here at UCSB to explore what it might mean to take comparative and interdisciplinary work seriously in Catholic Studies within the context of a public research university.
While there are many ways to engage that question, I want to suggest that the turn of the last century – the height of what we think of as the “modern era” -- provides a compelling vantage point for envisioning Catholic Studies in relation to both religious studies and the larger academic enterprise. It was during this period that religious studies emerged as an academic discipline, on the one hand, and that Pope Pius X in 1907 formally condemned “modernism” in the encyclical *Pascendi*, on the other. Though they engaged with it very differently, both the Catholic Church and the academic study of religion were deeply involved with modernity. In light of this mutual engagement, I want to ask what light a consideration of the relationship between Catholicism and the rise of the academic study of religion in this period might shed on envisioning what it means to do Catholic Studies here at UCSB.

An examination of histories of the rise of the academic study of religion during this formative period would lead you to believe that there was really not much of a relationship. Catholicism is rarely explicitly mentioned in these accounts and no Catholic thinkers are routinely identified as contributing to its development. Scholars typically depict the academic study of religion as coming into its own as a discipline in conjunction with the flowering of liberal Protestant theology and the comparative study of religion in the academy and concurrent developments in fields such as philology, ethnography, and folklore.¹ They frequently mention the Protestant comparativists Nathan Söderblom, Rudolf Otto, and Friedrich Heiler to illustrate the enduring influence of liberal Protestant theology on the development of the field during the early 20th century, noting the influence of their emphasis on religious experience on later figures such as Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, and Mircea Eliade. Because he adopted
a similar definition of religion, scholars frequently mention William James in the same
breath as the Protestant comparativists and subject their approaches to a common
critique. As scholars of religion have come to question the idea that “religious
experience” or “mysticism” constitutes the universal core of religion-in-general, they
have begun to ask why so many made appeals to experience at the turn-of-the-century.²
What cultural “work” was experience doing relative to religion in this period?³

To answer this question, we need to look at the interest in experience more
broadly. The turn to religious experience was not, I want to suggest, simply an outgrowth
of northern European liberal Protestantism, but a product, on the one hand, of
“modernizing” efforts within a variety of traditions – Hinduism, Buddhism, and
Catholicism, in addition to Protestantism – and of scientific interest in the study of
consciousness, on the other.⁴ While “modernizers” used the idea of experience to
undercut traditional sources of authority and interpret traditional concepts in new ways in
all these contexts, the work that experience did varied in relation to the tradition in
question and the conditions under which modernizers promoted their agenda.

To get at some of the specific ways in which the concept of experience was
utilized, I want to focus on the similarities and differences between three figures: the
Protestant comparativist, Nathan Söderblom; the philosopher and psychologist of
religion, William James; and the Catholic modernist and philosopher of religion,
Friedrich von Hügel. While, as I will explain shortly, there are interesting relations of
similarity and difference between these three figures, in the end I will suggest that
Söderblom and the tradition with which he is associated in the study of religion used
experience to identify that which they believed was unique or sui generis in religion and
thus to isolate religion from other disciplines, while James and von Hügel used experience as a bridge between science and religion and, thus, to create a more integrated or concilient worldview. Sorting out the similarities and differences between these figures’ use of experience will not only surface some of the latent assumptions that have structured the study of religion, but also surface alternative models for thinking about the relationship between religion and science. In making this comparison I aim to model an approach to Catholic Studies that is at once comparative and interdisciplinary. In approaching Catholic Studies in this way, we don’t just learn about Catholicism in isolation, but about Catholicism in relation to other traditions and other modes of thought.

I turn now to Söderblom, James, and von Hügel

Nathan Söderblom, a Swedish Lutheran who taught at the University of Uppsala for many years before becoming a bishop, was trained in Iranian religion and was perhaps best known outside Sweden for his entry on “holiness” in Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (1913). He also published a long essay on revelation in 1903 and a book on the modernist crisis among Catholics and Protestants in 1910. Along with Protestant comparativists of his era, such as Otto and Heiler, Söderblom followed the great liberal Protestant theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, in defining religion in terms of experience largely independent of doctrine and institution, resisted psychological interpretations of experience, and limited comparisons to religious phenomena.5

William James, who, as I indicated, is sometimes associated with the Protestant comparativists, fits uneasily in their midst. Like them, he did define religion, at least in the context of his Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), in relation to experience independent of doctrine and institution. As a psychologist rather than a theologian, he
analyzed and compared the religious experiences of believers from various traditions in light of research on hysteria, the doubling of the personality, and the automatic speech and writing associated with spiritualist mediums. He used the concept of the “subconscious” developed by psychical researcher Frederick Myers to explain religious experience in psychological terms, without ruling out the possibility of something more beyond the self.6

Baron Friedrich von Hügel was a philosopher of religion, a naturalized British citizen born of English and Austrian parents, and a lay Catholic deeply connected both to the modernist movement within the Catholic Church and the wider intellectual currents of his day. He entered into a voluminous correspondence with scholars in Europe and America. In The Mystical Element of Religion (1908), a multifaceted study of St. Catherine of Genoa, von Hügel, in contrast to James and the Protestant comparativists, defined the experiential or mystical as simply one aspect of religion, rooting his conception of religion in a dynamic interplay of three elements: the experiential, the intellectual, and institutional/historical. Like James, however, he engaged with psychology, following James’s lead in bringing the literature on hysteria to bear on religious experience and in utilizing the idea of the subconscious to explain the mystical or experiential dimension of religion.

How can we account for the differences in their definitions of religion?

The liberal Protestant emphasis on experience represented a more or less explicit attempt to undercut the restrictions imposed on the study of religion and theology by traditional church teachings. Postulating experience as an alternative locus of authority allowed these Protestant scholars, all of whom had appointments in the theological
faculties of their respective universities, to incorporate the comparative study of religion into a more expansive understanding of Protestant theology. The critical issue that arose for the Protestant comparativists in the wake of this shift was that of revelation. How, as theologians committed to Christianity, were they to understand Christian revelation relative to other religions? How, to put it crassly, could they get Christianity, actually Protestant Christianity, to come out on top — where they knew it belonged — given their definitional starting point in terms of experience? They accomplished this in various ways, though most commonly through the use of distinctions between “types” of religion, which they then arranged in evolutionary or developmental hierarchies. In these schemes, which played a tremendous role in the development of the academic study of religion, Catholicism for various reasons never came out on top. Whatever the explicit reasons, the bottom line, I would suggest, was that the Catholic Church, especially in the wake of the declaration of papal infallibility in 1870, epitomized authoritarian religiosity. The ideal type, the evolutionary pinnacle in these early theories of religion, had a distinctly Lutheran cast, idealized in the heroic individualism of the prophets, Jesus, Paul, Augustine, and culminating in Luther’s bold declaration: “here I stand, I can do no other” in the face of papal condemnation.7

This Protestant orientation was expressed with some subtlety in Söderblom’s essay on “The Nature of Revelation” (1903).8 There he made a distinction between two types of religion: “cultural religion” and “revealed religion” and two ways of communing with God: “the mysticism of infinity” and “the mysticism of personality.” Though he insisted that there were no pure types in actual practice, it is nonetheless clear that revealed religion and the mysticism of personality came together most fully in
“evangelical [i.e. Protestant] Christianity.” Catholicism represented a more “mixed type” for Söderblom, a blending of cultural religion and revealed religion, on the one hand, and the “ecstatic” mysticism of infinity and the mysticism of personality, on the other. The great mystics most revered by Catholics, including Pseudo-Dionysius, Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, and St. Theresa, wound up as “mixed types,” while those that exemplified “the mysticism of personality” constituted a veritable pantheon of Protestant favorites: Augustine, Luther, Pascal, John Bunyan, and Kierkegaard.9

As I have indicated, scholars have, in my view, too easily assimilated James to this tradition.10 While he was, without question, a religious modernizer whose pragmatic approach to truth certainly can be (and has been) read as anti-authoritarian, his relationship to Protestantism was uneasy. More to the point, as a scientist, James’s approach to defining religion differed from that of the Protestant comparativists. Where they offered what scholar’s refer to as essentialist definitions of religion, that is, definitions grounded in what they believed to be true about religion, James merely stipulated a definition, that is, specified a definition of religion appropriate to and chosen in light of his specific research interests.11 While essentialist definitions provide – in effect – a theological starting point for research, stipulative definitions, by way of contrast, are provisional, chosen in relation to a research agenda and subject – in theory anyway – to testing and revision.

James’s primary purpose in writing the *Varieties of Religious Experience* was not theological, but rather to continue the investigations of “exceptional mental states,” many of them avowedly pathological, that had preoccupied him throughout much of the 1890s. He defined religion in terms of religious experience so that he could compare such
experiences with other exceptional mental states and explain them in terms of what was known experimentally at that time. In utilizing Myers’ particular understanding of the subconscious to explain how persons might subjectively experience a presence that they took to be an external power, James left open the question of where the subconscious ended, whether in the personal self or beyond it, and thus placed ultimate questions about origins outside the purview of the science of religions. In this way, he attempted to bridge science and religion by offering an explanation of religious experience in terms that he hoped would be acceptable to both psychologists and theologians. His definition, while similar in substance to that of the Protestant comparativists, was crafted toward different ends.

Von Hügel’s motives for adopting his definition were both theological and scientific. To situate von Hügel, we need to bring France into the picture: French Protestantism, French Catholic modernism, the French authorship of the papal encyclical condemning modernism, and French psychology. While Söderblom’s modernism took its inspiration from Schleiermacher, his appropriation of Schleiermacher was mediated by the French Protestant theologian Auguste Sabatier, with whom he studied for four years in Paris.12 Although Sabatier was not a comparativist in the fashion of Söderblom, Otto, and Heiler, he represents a crucial link between the Protestant comparativists, William James, the Catholic modernists, and the papal condemnation of modernism. An understanding of Sabatier can help us to understand the context in which von Hügel wrote.

Writing in 1897, Sabatier defined living religion in terms of the relationship between the “soul in distress” and the “mysterious power upon which it feels itself to
depend.” James quoted Sabatier’s definition of religion in the *Varieties* and commented that “the entire series of our lectures proves the truth of M. Sabatier’s contention.”\(^{13}\) It was this identification of the core of religion with the experience of a higher power (the sacred, the holy, etc.) – largely “apart from ecclesiastical or theological complications” as James put it -- that James, Sabatier and Söderblom, all shared.\(^{14}\)

As a French Protestant in a Catholic dominated context in which church and state were still not formally separated, Sabatier more explicitly framed his emphasis on experience – his liberal Protestant theology of experience -- in opposition to a Catholic theology of authority than did the others. He viewed both theologies as having direct implications for the social order, especially, he said, in France, where “the religious question underlies all political agitation.”\(^{15}\) In its condemnation of modernism in 1907, the Vatican – and, in the eyes of many non-Catholics, the Church – lived up to its reputation for authoritarianism.

The encyclical *Pascendi* was drafted by a French theologian, Joseph Lemius, whose notes make it clear that the encyclical’s synthetic picture of modernism was based largely on Lemius’s analysis of the work of the French modernist, Albert Loisy, and Sabatier, upon whose thought Loisy relied heavily.\(^{16}\) The encyclical was centrally concerned with the problem of revelation and specifically condemned the idea that revelation arises through individual experience. Adding James’s idea of the subconscious to the experiential understanding of revelation advanced by Sabatier and Loisy, *Pascendi* condemned the idea that “the origin of all religion, even supernatural religion … is only a development of … religious sentiment … which … emerges from the lurking places of the subconsciousness.”\(^{17}\) The underlying threat of such a theory, as the encyclical made
clear, was that it potentially allowed anyone access to authentic experiential religious knowledge and undermined the Church’s exclusive claim to truth. “Given this doctrine of experience,” the encyclical noted, “every religion, even that of paganism, must be held to be true. … For on what ground, according to their theories, could falsity be predicated of any religion whatsoever?”

Von Hügel’s definition was a theological work of art, a delicate balancing act positioned between the poles of the liberal Protestant emphasis on individual experience and the Vatican’s condemnation of modernism. Though Söderblom admired von Hügel tremendously and considered him the most eminent of the Catholic modernists, he felt von Hügel’s definition conceded too much to institutional authority and too little to the individual, in effect elevating “the institution over the creative personalities, the geniuses of the world of religion – the prophets, Jesus Christ, Paul, and especially Luther.”

While scholars today critique Söderblom’s definition for its essentialist emphasis on individual experience, von Hügel, largely because he was Catholic, took a very different and, at the time, unusual approach, defining religion in terms of the dynamic interplay between three factors, thus, avoiding the idea of an essence or core altogether.

Von Hügel’s motives for adopting his definition were not simply theological, however. He took direct issue with James’s definition of religion on methodological grounds and used James’s writings on the psychological concept of “reflex action” as an inspiration for his own reformulated definition. In marked contrast to the Protestant comparativists, both von Hügel and James sought to ground their understanding of religion in an underlying psychological understanding of experience.

**Why did they differ in relation to psychology?**
While the Protestant comparativists compared religious traditions and resisted psychological explanations, both James and von Hügel engaged psychology directly. To understand their approach to religion, their engagement with psychology, and their mutual appropriation of the idea of the subconscious in relation to religious experience, we need to position their interest in experience not only as a reaction to authoritarian confessional understandings of religion but also in relation to the turn-of-the-century study of the mind by neurologists, experimental psychologists, and psychical researchers. For much of the nineteenth century, France was the recognized center of research in neurology and the emerging field of experimental psychology. During the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Pierre Janet, a student of Jean-Martin Charcot, was the leading French clinician in an international network of researchers that included William James, the Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy, and British psychical researchers, such as Frederic Myers. All were interested in investigating the interface between psychopathology, religious experience, and mediumistic abilities through intensive case studies of unusual individuals, virtually all of them -- it turns out -- women.

While von Hügel was not himself a psychologist, he drew upon the writings of Janet, James, and the British psychologist, James Ward, in his historical case study of St. Catherine of Genoa. In addition to discussing St. Catherine in light of Janet’s research on hysteria, von Hügel also appropriated the idea of the subconscious as understood by James and Myers as a means of explaining the mystical or experiential aspect of religion-in-general. Indeed, von Hügel’s understanding of mysticism taken on its own was similar in many ways to the religious sentiment that arises through the subconscious condemned in Pascendi. In contrast to the conception condemned in Pascendi, however,
von Hügel sought to maintain a dynamic relationship between this “diffused Religiosity” and the specific, historical concreteness of revelation in Christ. To do so, he argued that “the diffused Religiosity … and the concentrated spirituality and concrete, thoroughly characteristic Religion, which has its culmination … in the Divine-Human figure and spirit of Jesus Christ: are interdependent, in somewhat the way in which vague, widely spread Subconsciousness requires, and is required by, definite, narrowly localized Consciousness in each human mind.”

For von Hügel, the relationship between generalized mysticism and historical religions, such as Christianity, was analogous to the relationship between the subconscious and consciousness. The idea of a spectrum of awareness, which he attributed distantly to Leibniz and Kant and more proximately to Janet, James, and Ward, formed the theoretical basis for von Hügel’s theology of religions, specifically his understanding of how all people and all religions might have access to some intimations of Christ without direct consciousness of the source of their apprehensions. It is in this way, he concluded, that “Christ can remain supreme, even though Moses and Elijah, … Plato and Plotinus, … Gautama Buddha and Rabbi Akiba [can] be all revered as God-loved and God-loving, as, in various amounts, truly, spiritually great.”

The contrast between von Hügel and the Protestant comparativists when it came to psychological explanations of religion is striking and itself cries out for some sort of explanation. Von Hügel’s friend and fellow modernist, George Tyrrell, claimed that “nothing is more characteristic of the difference between Catholicism and that sort of scholastic Protestantism which ripened into the cold eighteenth-century deism than the attitude of the two systems towards the sub-conscious.” Tyrrell added that “instinctively
and experimentally Catholicism has always acknowledged and utilised [the]
psychological laws and principles … discovered by] [t]he modern psychologist” and he
rooted this acknowledgment in the Catholic understanding that “man is psychological as
well as spiritual – mostly the former.”

Tyrrell’s emphasis on humans as both psychological and spiritual was echoed by
von Hügel. Von Hügel viewed Catholicism as taking a both/and approach (“grace and
nature, eternity and time, soul and body”) in contrast to the Protestant emphasis on
either/or (“grace, not nature; eternity, not time; soul, not body”). Von Hügel
differentiated Protestant and Catholic modernism along these lines, explaining to a group
of Presbyterian students that Catholic modernism went “back to Erasmus (Savonarola)
and [the] Synoptics [Gospels], not [as was the case with the Protestant modernists to]
Luther, Calvin, Augustine, St. Paul.” Tyrrell and von Hügel’s emphasis on the both/and
parallels James’s famous argument against the “medical materialists” in the opening
lecture of the Varieties and David Tracy’s more recent distinction between the typically
Catholic analogical imagination, which emphasizes continuities, and the typically
Protestant dialectical imagination, which emphases ruptures.

The Protestant comparativists’ resistance to psychology was rooted, I would
suggest, in their sense of the radical otherness of the holy characteristic of the Protestant
tradition more generally and congruent with more dualistic traditions within philosophy.
Psychological theories, by way of contrast, emphasized the similarities between various
sorts of experiences of “otherness,” some of them clearly not religious. This continuity
was obvious to James and von Hügel, both of whom embraced a philosophical
conception of experience that undercut mind/body and subject/object dualisms. Thus,
James reminded readers worried that he was going to reduce the material to the spiritual, that “[t]here is not a single one of our states of mind, high or low, healthy or morbid, that has not some organic process as its condition” (21). So too, for von Hügel, there was no manifestation of the divine however diffuse (as in mysticism) or concentrated (as in the incarnation) in which the divine was not incarnate in the human and, thus, in which the spiritual was not, quite literally, embodied in the materiality of bodies, institutions, and history.32

[Conclusion: the work of experience at the turn of the century]

To conclude, we can identify several different types of cultural work that the concept of experience was being asked to perform at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Protestant comparativists utilized essentialist definitions of religious experience in order to resist psychological explanations, on the one hand, and narrowly confessional definitions of religion as epitomized by Pascendi, on the other. James, by way of contrast, stipulated a definition of religion in terms of the experience of the individual in order to create an object of study that could be examined in light of experimental research on exceptional mental states.33 Von Hügel engaged with experience both to resist a narrowly external or intellectualist understanding of revelation and, following James, to ground religious experience in psychology. He used the relationship between the subconscious and consciousness to conceptualize the relationship between the three elements that, in his view, constituted religion: the experiential, the intellectual, and the historical/institutional.

While the Protestant comparativists approached the matter/spirit and body/mind distinctions from an either/or perspective, James and von Hügel approached them in a
both/and fashion. In using experience to identify that which they believed was unique or 
sui generis in religion, Söderblom and his heirs within the study of religion isolated 
religion from other disciplines. In drawing upon the subconscious, James and von Hügel 
used the empirical study of experience as a bridge between science and religion and, in 
doing so, attempted to create a more integrated or concilient worldview.

For scholars of religion, bringing Catholicism – the “other” within Christianity -- 
into the history of the discipline provides a vantage point for surfacing the latent 
assumptions that have structured the study of religion in Protestant-dominated contexts. 
At a time when the “body” and “materiality” have overshadowed “religious experience” 
and “mysticism” as key terms in the study of religion, von Hügel’s dynamic definition 
stands as a welcome corrective to our scholarly mood swings. Finally, exploring the 
relationship between Catholic modernists and the psychology of religion surfaces 
alternative historical models for thinking about the relationship between religion and the 
natural sciences, that are, in my view, more suggestive for our work in the present than 
models that stress the radical disjunction between them.

Today I have tried to illustrate what it might mean for Catholic Studies to model 
and foster both comparative work across traditions and interdisciplinary work within the 
university in light of my own research. Our first Catholic Studies conference at UCSB, 
scheduled for May 4-5, 2006, will offer another model. There we will consider the role 
and impact of “The Catholic Church as Global Actor” from both comparative and 
interdisciplinary perspectives. The conference will feature a keynote lecture by Thomas 
J. Reese on this subject. The entire conference will be free and open to the public. 
Thank you.
ENDNOTES


5 Otto and Heiler were both German Protestant theologians -- Otto firmly so and Heiler a somewhat regretful convert from Catholicism – and early historians of religion. Otto is best known for Das Heilige (1914; published in English in as The Idea of the Holy [1923]) and Heiler for Das Gebet, a comparative study of prayer.

6 James viewed religion in an open-ended evolutionary framework. As a post-Protestant of a metaphysical sort (he referred to himself – tongue in cheek – as one point as a “protestant protestant” and at another as a “Methodist minus a savior”), he viewed this evolutionary process as open-ended rather than as culminating in Protestantism or Christianity. James viewed the subconscious as the source of new insights and inspirations (analogous to genetic mutations) of which only the fittest would survive. Note: Söderblom didn’t view religion through a mono-evolutionary lens.

7 Söderblom’s Protestantism was expressed with some subtlety in his essay on “The Nature of Revelation” (1903). [ Söderblom’s debt to Sabatier was evident is his claim that “the roots of religion lie … in the spirit,” that is, “in the very innermost center of the personal life of the individual” (Söderblom, “Revelation,” 40-41).] There he made a distinction between two types of religion: “cultural religion” and “revealed religion” and two forms of communion with God: “the mysticism of infinity” and “the mysticism of personality.” Though he insisted that there were no pure types in actual practice, it is nonetheless clear that revealed religion and the mysticism of personality came together most fully in “evangelical [i.e. Protestant] Christianity.” Catholicism represented a more “mixed type” for Söderblom, a blending of cultural religion and revealed religion, on the one hand, and the “ecstatic” mysticism of infinity and the mysticism of personality, on the other. The great mystics most revered by Catholics wound up as “mixed types,” while those that exemplified “the mysticism of personality” constituted a veritable pantheon of Protestant favorites: Augustine, Luther, Pascal, John Bunyan, and Kierkegaard (81, 85, 89). He favored those he perceived as having retained their individuality even at the point of their most intimate contact with the divine. This preservation of personality, as opposed to the total loss of self in the divine, was the prerequisite for revelation. Nothing could be revealed if there was no one there to receive it. This link between the individual personality and revelation ran counter to more institutionalized understandings of revelation and thus tacitly undercut their authority. Söderblom acknowledged the struggle against ecclesiastical authority that lay at the heart of the rise of the comparative study of religion when he observed, in passing, that most comparativists were “so blinded by the kaleidoscopic richness of its field, and so happy at having escaped … from the restrictions of the church’s confessions,” that they had not yet noticed the remarkable distinctions between types of religion that Söderblom was setting forth [Söderblom, Uppenbarelsereligion (1903), p. 55, quoted in Sharpe, Söderblom, 113].

8 Söderblom’s debt to Sabatier was evident is his claim that “the roots of religion lie … in the spirit,” that is, “in the very innermost center of the personal life of the individual” (Söderblom, “Revelation,” 40-41).

9 Söderblom, “Revelation,” 81, 85, 89.

10 Hollinger, Schmidt.

11 Perry, II: 324-25.

12 Sabatier and Schleiermacher; Söderblom translated Sabatier’s Outlines into Swedish and gave his inaugural lecture for the position at Uppsala on Schleiermacher; Otto and Schleiermacher.

13 VRE, 366 or 416-17 – check edition (emphasis added).
guarantees it. For Protestantism, the form and the authority of revelation is – the Bible; for Catholicism, it must be embodied in a form which distinguishes it from all others, and placed under an authority that three stages: mythological, the dogmatic, and the critical (34). In its doctrinal form, “the divine doctrine that this response is always, in germ at least, in prayer itself” (30). The idea of revelation evolves through the prayer of man … revelation is the response of God,” but only, he adds, “on the condition that we add.

Religion of the first type “becomes inherent in civil society itself … [and] neither suppresses nor does higher and external authority with the education, training, and government of human spirits.” (vii). Consciences that have been tilled and sown by the divine Spirit, or as a supernatural institution charged by a previous to all this, some of the Italian bishops, in their pastoral letters, had attempted such a synthesis. We would particularly mention that of Mgr Rossi, Bishop of Acerenza and Matera. In this composition of his two works on religious synthesis (“Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'aprè la psychologie et l'histoire”, Paris, 1897; "Les religions d'autorité et la religion de l'espirit", Paris, 1902). CE, s.v. “Modernism.”

Modernism is a composite system: its assertions and claims lack that principle which unites the natural faculties in a living being. The Encyclical "Pascendi" was the first Catholic synthesis of the subject. Out of scattered materials it built up what looked like a logical system. Indeed friends and foes alike could not but admire the patient skill that must have been needed to fashion something like a coordinated whole. In their answer to the Encyclical, "Il programma dei Modernisti", the Modernists tried to retouch this synthesis. Previous to all this, some of the Italian bishops, in their pastoral letters, had attempted such a synthesis. We would particularly mention that of Mgr Rossi, Bishop of Acerenza and Matera. In this respect, too, Abbate Cavallanti’s book, already referred to, deserves mention. Even earlier still, German and French Protestants had done some synthetical work in the same direction. Prominent among them are Kant, "Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der reinen Vernunft" (1803); Schleiermacher, "Der christliche Glaube" (1821-1822); and A. Sabatier, "Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'apre la psychologie et l'histoire" (1897). CE, s.v. “Modernism.”

In an essay on modernism and religious experience, the French scholar, Domnique Dubarle, locates various influences behind the idea of religious immanence, including Kant, Schleiermacher, Auguste Sabatier (a French Protestant theologian whose Outline of a philosophy of religion was published in 1897), and the writings of the Catholic philosopher, Maurice Blondel (Dominique Dubarle, “Modernisme et experience religieuse,” in Modernisme ed., P. Colin, et. al. (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1980), 181-82).

14 In “The Religion of Revelation” (1903), Söderblom located “the center of religion in the life of the human being … in the spirit,” claiming that “the same experience and insight, which in the science of religion is bound up with the name of Schleiermacher, is found on closer examination, under different terms and in spite of great differences, in all the great and earnest thinkers concerning religion” (Nathan Söderblom, “The Religion of Revelation” (1903) in idem, The Nature of Revelation (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 41). Eleven years later, he launched his famous entry on “Holiness” with the words: “Holiness is the great word in religion; it is even more essential than the notion of God. Real religion may exist without a definite conception of divinity, but there is no real religion without a distinction between holy and profane. … The definition of piety (subjective religion) runs thus: ‘Religious is the man to whom something is holy’” (Hasting’s ERE [1914], s.v. “Holiness.”).

15 Auguste Sabatier, Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), viii. “In fact, the relations between civil and religious society, between Church and State, necessarily differ in character according as religion is conceived of as an inner inspiration upspringing in human consciences that have been tilled and sown by the divine Spirit, or as a supernatural institution charged by a higher and external authority with the education, training, and government of human spirits.” (vii). Religion of the first type “becomes inherent in civil society itself … [and] neither suppresses nor does violence to its legitimate development.” Religion of the second type, in contrast, gives rise to “irremediable conflicts, less violent among Protestant nations, because the authority of Protestant dogma is always relative, more profound and acute among Catholic peoples” (viii).

16 Indeed, some historians have argued that Pascendi more accurately condemned the thought of Sabatier than any other single individual. It was through the writings of A. Sabatier (18391901), a French Protestant of the Broad Church type that the religious theories we have spoken of, spread among the Latin races, in France and in Italy. It is in these countries, too, that modernism has done greatest harm among the Catholics. Sabatier is a radical modernist. He has especially drawn upon Schleiermacher for the composition of his two works on religious synthesis (“Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion d'apre la psychologie et l'histoire", Paris, 1897; "Les religions d'autorité et la religion de l'esprit", Paris, 1902). CE, s.v. “Modernism.”

17 Pascendi dominici gregis, §10. For Sabatier, the ideas of religion and revelation are “correlative and religiously inseparable. Religion is simply the subjective revelation of God in man, and revelation is religion objective in God.” “The object of God can only be God Himself, and if a definition must of it [revelation] it may be said to consist of the creation, the purification, and the progressive clearness of the consciousness of God in man, -- in the individual and in the race” (Sabatier, Outline, 32-33). “Religion is the prayer of man … revelation is the response of God,” but only, he adds, “on the condition that we add that this response is always, in germ at least, in prayer itself” (30). The idea of revelation evolves through three stages: mythological, the dogmatic, and the critical (34). In its doctrinal form, “the divine doctrine must be embodied in a form which distinguishes it from all others, and placed under an authority that guarantees it. For Protestantism, the form and the authority of revelation is – the Bible; for Catholicism, it...
is the Bible sovereignly interpreted by the Church” (43). He describes the dogmatic form of revelation as both “irreligious” and “anti-psychological” (45).

18 Pascendi, §14. The condemnation was built upon a theory of religion constructed by Lemius in light of his reading of Loisy, Sabatier, and a few others, including William James, which asserts that “the origin of all religion, even supernatural religion … is only a development of … religious sentiment … which … emerges from the lurking places of the subconsciousness.”

19 Pascendi’s depiction of modernism in terms of a theory of religion grounded in religious experience reflects the modernist currents in France and Italy, both contexts in which mediating postures, such as Sabatier’s, were more reactively anti-Catholic than mediating figures in Protestant dominated contexts. This lends plausibility to the German denial of modernism and highlights the potential significance of Friedrich von Hügel’s strong ties to German scholarship.

20 Sharpe, 154. “Even at its best, in the work of Baron von Hügel, [Catholic Modernism] had elevated the institution over the creative personalities, the geniuses of the world of religion – the prophets, Jesus Christ, Paul, and especially Luther. The Bible was too little known and there was a distressing gap between scholarship and piety.” This is a reference to “superstition” and reflects the Pauline dualism that FvH critiques. FvH viewed Protestants as emphasizing Paul at the expense of the synoptic gospels and in the process losing sight “of certain true elements in the pre- and extra-Christian religions” (MER, 118). FvH, in speaking to Presbyterian students on modernism in Jan 1909, described it “as going back to Erasmus (Savonarola) and Synoptics, not Luther, Calvin, Augustine, St. Paul” (diary, quoted in Kelly, 97-98).


22 Söderblom, however, viewed him as an exemplary ecumenist (Kelly, 212). Kelly adds that “The baron’s ecumenism extended beyond the limits of institutional Christianity and embraced all religions. For example, in his posthumous work The Reality of God he urged the Christian theologian ‘to enlarge Augustine’s literary storehouse, and to bear in mind Indian and Persian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman sighings after God’” (R.G., 36, cited in Kelly, 212). Also say: “Von Hügel was one of the first Catholic theologians to recognize the necessity of this and to integrate the results of the historical and comparative study of religions within his theological work. In his brief history of the rise of the comparative study of religions Joachim Wach situations von Hügel alongside Max Scheler as one of the two Catholic thinkers who played a major role in the development of this new science” (Joachim Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions [London, 1969], 5-6 cited in Kelly, 212). Both James and von Hügel embraced what today might be called concilience, that is, a desire to integrate knowledge at a variety of levels ranging from the physiological to the religious and philosophical. While the Protestant comparativists and their successors have been linked with the emergence of religious studies as an autonomous discipline, James and von Hügel were both invertebrate boundary crossers whose interests and work cannot be so easily pigeonholed. James was trained in medicine, moving from there into experimental psychology and psychical research, and eventually into philosophy. His VRE represents a foray into the study of religion by a self-described psychologist when invited to give the prestigious Gifford lectures on religion in Edinburgh. While von Hügel’s spiritual and intellectual life centered on religion more directly than did James’s his interests were similarly wide-ranging and his concilient impulses similarly marked. As he acknowledged in 1904, I have been taught, by a bitter experience … that though, alas, I could cease to believe, though possibly I could cease to think upon subjects of religion: that, as long as I do believe, I cannot cease to study, with the best methods procurable, the historical and psychological sides of the very realities of that life which I love and try to live by, from which I spring and to which I go.” Friedrich von Hügel, “The case of the Abbé Loisy,” The Pilot 9/199 (9 January 1904), 31, quoted in L. Barmann, “Baron Friedrich von Hügel and Mysticism: In Pursuit of the Christian Ideal,” in Sanctity and Secularity during the Modernist Period, Subsidia hagiographica 79, ed. L. Barmann and C. J. T. Talar (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1999), 111.


25 On Ward’s importance for von Hügel, see James J. Kelly, Baron Friedrich von Hügel’s Philosophy of Religion (Leuven: University Press, 1983), 80-88. There was significant overlap in the thinking of Ward and James, although as their lengthy correspondence indicates, they had sharp disagreements at significant
points, particularly over the value of psychical research. Cf. Ward to WJ, 12 Jan 1891: With regard to WJ’s “Briefer Course”, Ward refers to differences with respect to mind-body problem. Adds, “Finally your penchant for ‘spiritualism’ in the new sense amazes me.” Letters 7:136. WJ responds 1 Nov. 92: “As for what you say of the relation of feeling to emotion and action I will admit that what one may call elementary feeling may be an integral part of all consciousness. What you, Külpe, and lately Fouillée have written on that seems to me pretty conclusive” (Letters 7: 329). There is no note on Fouillée. Siegel’s Idea of the Soul discusses Alfred Fouillé, “Les grandes conclusions de la psychologie contemporaine: la conscience et ses transformations,” Revue des deux mondes 17 (1891): 789-816.

Von Hügel and Ward knew each other through their mutual participation in the London-based Synthetic Society, an organization dedicated to finding a “working philosophy of religious belief.” Its membership included many of the best known English scientists, philosophers, theologians, and politicians of the period. Among their disparate number were leading members of the S.P.R., such as Henry Sidgwick, Frederick Myers, Arthur Balfour, and Oliver Lodge, as well as leading Catholics, including, in addition to von Hügel, Wilfrid Ward and George Tyrrell (Root). In his letter to James, von Hügel indicates that he and James Ward had “repeatedly discussed together a further, prominent feature of your book [the VRE], which neither of us could manage to accept … I mean your very plain inclination to make much as of spiritual worth and evidential force, of spiritualistic phenomena and experiences” (Adams, 231). Cf. also, Ward to WJ, 10 Nov. 1892: “My reference to the S.P.R. … was no ‘boutade’. I think you a most arrogant set of people. You have spoiled two good words – psychical & spiritual & made us no wiser. I have always let you alone & always mean to; but then I expect to be let alone myself” (Letters 7: 338). Von Hügel followed James and others in defining mysticism as “the diffused Religiosity and more or less inchoate religion, readily discoverable … more or less throughout the world of human souls.”

Von Hügel, Mysticism as an Element of Religion [hereafter MER], 266-67.

Ibid., 268.


Von Hügel, MER, 119. FvH, in speaking to Presbyterian students on modernism in Jan 1909, described Catholic modernism “as going back to Erasmus (Savonarola) and Synoptics, not Luther, Calvin, Augustine, St. Paul” (diary, quoted in Kelly, 97-98). This way of explaining the difference would – interestingly enough -- parallels David Tracy’s well known distinction between the dialectical and analogical imaginations that (respectively) typify Protestant and Catholic theologies [David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 414-15].

The unity of thought in both James and von Hügel is rooted in their notion of experience in contrast to the dualistic mind-body distinction (and Pauline theology) presupposed by the Protestant comparativists.Cf. Cooper on James and Kelly on von Hügel.


This is contrary to Jay’s depiction of James’s VRE and the current of the times.