

## MODERNISM AND THE PAPAL ENCYCLICAL

Right Rev. Mr. Canon Moyes in the Nineteenth Century.

Two questions suggested by recent events are not unfrequently upon the lips of inquirers: 'What is Modernism?' and 'Why has the Pope condemned it?' We may put aside, first of all, the hasty conjecture that the Pope, by some traditional instinct of his, has wished to fulminate against modern life and progress. The term 'Modernism' is not of the Pope's minting. It was used by Modernist writers themselves to connote their own ethos of thought and writing, and the Pope—rather courteously, I think—took the term just as he found it. For the rest, the Church has no particular quarrel with whatever is sound and best in modern civilisation. If every people in Christendom wished to have a fuller measure of civil liberty under more democratic conditions the Holy See has declared that the Church is indifferent to forms of government, and that she is ready to bless and support any or all which the nations may wish to adopt. If men desire to make the most abundant use of the scientific discoveries which have come to enrich modern life, and to talk to one another by wireless telegraphy, and visit one another in airplanes, the Church is ready to rejoice with them in all that they may do for the purpose. The only liberty which she denies to her members is that of saying 'no' where God has said 'yes,' or, to put it otherwise, the liberty, in those who profess her creeds and share her communion, of saying yes and no at the same time.

At first sight it would seem that Modernism is not a mere tangled web of tendencies, but that it is a complete whole, and that therefore it is possible to define it, at least in a broad and general way, by saying that it is a form of belief which finds the origin of all religion and knowledge of God in the soul's internal sense and experience. And if this definition should prompt the further question 'What is that feels the sense and produces the experience?' it would be necessary to add that Modernism replies that it is the Divine Reality or God Himself who by a permanent indwelling and action in the soul—called Immaculation—manifests Himself in some measure to us, and draws it into union with Him. In point of fact, such a definition falls very far short of covering the area to be defined, for it represents at most what may be regarded as the primary principle from which Modernism sets out, or upon which, or around which, it builds. Taking the thought movement as it actually exists, it will suffice for the moment to say that it is a group of beliefs, manifold and various, as to more or less interconnected as to form a system, and that this system will be best understood if we consider a few of its more salient beliefs in detail.

In the recent Papal Encyclical *Pascendi Gregis* there is contained a very able and remarkable exposition of the Modernist doctrine, one, in fact, so full and elaborate that the general reader may perhaps be excusable if he has been found to have shirked the task of studying it quite as closely and carefully as the document certainly deserves. The scope of the present article is merely to indicate a few of the chief Modernist beliefs, so that it may suggest an answer in brief to the question as to the meaning of Modernism, and at the same time to show the line of demarcation between these doctrines and Catholic faith, so that the reader may gather for himself the answer to that further question as to the reasons which have led the Pope to condemn it. I take it that we shall be fairly at the heart of the Modernist system if out of the structure of its doctrines we select the following five.

I may add that in what follows I speak distinctively of the Catholic Church, because I have no sort of claim to speak of any other, but I do not wish to imply that many of the great principles which the Encyclical defends are not happily common to a large number of sincere and earnest Christians outside her pale.

## I.—NON-INTERVENTION OF THE DIVINE IN HISTORY.

A fundamental tenet of Modernism is the entire separation of the domain of faith from that of history. These two domains are held to be as circles which do not intersect in any part of their area. All that is divine or supernatural is assigned to the one; all that is visible or verifiable is claimed for the other. It will be observed that this assumes a priori that a divine or supernatural fact—such as the Resurrection or the feeding of the multitude in the desert—cannot be effected in such a way as to be visible or provable, and so become matter of history. It follows that all those parts of the Gospel which narrate facts of a miraculous or supernatural character—some three-fifths of the entire text—must be treated as devoid of any historical reality. Most of all, this principle of the non-intervention of the divine in history affects the concept of Christ, and insists upon a practical distinction between the Christ of historical fact and the Christ of Faith. The Christ of historical fact is a man who enters this world and leaves it like any one else, whose body rots in the grave and goes into dust like those of other men. He passes through life with the same limitations of knowledge and education imposed upon him by the circumstances of his place and time. His religious experience lifts him indeed above the level of the average man, but as far as the reality of historical fact goes, he is simply a Galilean peasant and a man who lived and died amongst his fellows. It is urged against this abatement of Christ that we have the evidence of the evangelists that He did works which transcended the power of man, the Modernist reply is that it is precisely this transcending element that is not real history, or historical fact, but history transfigured and embroidered by the faith of His followers, and that consequently it has to be eliminated from the genuine historical account of Christ as presented to us in

the New Testament. There is, thus, neither a Divine Christ nor any intervention of the divine to be found in history. In conformity with this principle, Modernists are said to have asserted that no genuine proof of the divinity of Christ is discoverable in the synoptic Gospels. With a plan of the elimination of the divine agreed upon beforehand, and a priori as part of the principle of non-intervention, it would certainly have been somewhat surprising if there had been. Were this determination to shut out all evidence of the divine from history adopted only *pro forma* or for argument's sake, in seeking a common ground when dealing with unbelievers, it might reasonably be understood as a mere policy of apologetic. But it is significant that with the Modernist it is not a matter of policy, but a matter of principle, and that it is sincerely held as lying at the very foundation of his system. He believes that in his history, as in science, our observation falls only on phenomena, and that the Divine Reality does not and cannot enter into the sphere of human life or activity, so as to become a figure or agent in history.

In the face of this root principle of denial, and of its rigorous consequence in the reduction of Christ to the human level on the stage of history, the Catholic Church through her Supreme Head has raised her voice in condemnation and correction. Biting what she is, and believing what she does, it is difficult to see how she could have acted otherwise. The exclusion of a Divine Christ from the domain of historical fact, and the cardinal principle upon which it rests, namely the non-intervention of the divine in human history, is felt to be not only incompatible with Catholic faith, but subversive of Christianity. For Christianity is nothing if not the religion of the Incarnation, and from the standpoint of the Catholic Church, the very meaning and the whole significance of the Incarnation is precisely that the divine did enter into our human life and history, and that God was born into this world, lived and walked, and taught in our midst, and that He was the author of the words that men heard from His human lips, and of the works which they saw wrought by His human hands. All this, and nothing less than this, the Church finds in the revealed truth that 'the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us.'

No one imagines that in this life, the Divine Nature in its essence becomes visible or tangible, but every one who accepts the Catholic view of the Incarnation holds that a Divine Person came here upon earth, and said divine words and did divine deeds which were visible and tangible, and consequently matter of history, and of true narration by the evangelists. This presence and action of the divine in the human life, made evidence in such a way that they could be witnessed to, and become the rational groundwork of the supernatural act of faith, are an essential part of Catholic Christianity. In fact, without it, our Christianity would be bereft of any historical basis, and taken apart from this bed-rock of testimony, it would be difficult to see how our faith could be anything more than that blind subjective emotion which the Church has long since repudiated under the name of fideism, or faith without natural and rational foundation. It is needless to say that we do not save our souls by believing in history or by any more intellectual proposition, but we save them by faith—an assent of the intellect prompted by the will—believing with the help of grace, the words and work of God, the saying and doing of which are entrenched in history. It was with a view to safeguarding this supreme interest of the reasonable character of our service of faith that the Vatican Council affirmed that the obedience of faith was not a blind action of the mind, and that besides the inspiration of grace, it has to justify its willful assent by having a basis of proof in 'divine facts,' and is thus brought 'into harmony with reason.' (See Dogmatic Constitution of the Vatican, Chap. III.) That is only to say that, by the wise building of Him Who is at once the author of nature and of grace, reason underlies faith, and the natural is the groundwork of the supernatural. Thus, the Catholic Church, not merely by the recent Encyclical, but by the teaching of the Vatican Council of the Vatican, has taken up a position which must by its very meaning resist to the uttermost any elimination of the divine element from the domain of Gospel history. That must stand for the answer to the question why Pius X. has condemned the doctrines of the Modernists.

## II.—THE EVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

Under this second tenet of the Modernist system, it may be observed that the collision between it and the accepted Catholic teaching travels back once more to the concept of the Incarnation. The Catholic mind in thinking of Christ instinctively begins from the side of the divine, for there alone is the Person, to Whom all His words and acts are assignable albeit operated in the human nature. It knows that to speak of Christ is to speak of God the Son, living, teaching, suffering in His humanity. It will never accept as the relation between the human soul of Christ and His Godhead anything short of a union which makes one personality. It regards as an evasion of Christianity any attempt to treat Christ as a mere glorified super-human, a man split into some vague or undefined closeness to God, or a man who has been merely filled or inspired by God, or a man differing only from the rest of men inasmuch as he has been vouchsafed an exceptional measure of religious experience. Its reply to all such mingling formulae is the simple and straightforward one, that He is God—God made man for our salvation—and in this truth it finds and feels the whole joy and strength of its Christianity. This concept of Christ—made clear at the Council of Ephesus fourteen centuries ago—will explain why the Catholic conscience recoils from certain views which Modernist writers have expressed on the evolutionary character

of the human knowledge or consciousness of Christ. It is not that the Catholic Church could ever suppose that the human soul of Christ possessed the absolute omniscience of His Godhead, for the Infinite cannot be contained in the finite. But it is the common accepted teaching, not merely of Catholic theologians, but of Fathers and Councils of the Church, that by virtue of the personal union of His human soul to the Godhead, He ever possessed a super-excellent share in the divine knowledge, and thus had that power of knowing all that it wished or needed to know, which has been called relative omniscience. In such knowledge there is necessarily perfectibility, and theologians of the school of St. Thomas have taught that there was a real, as well as an onward progress in Christ's human knowledge and experience. It is not, therefore, that Catholic teaching denies any sort of evolution, in the sense of progress, in the knowledge in the human mind of Christ, but that it maintains that such evolution must be one that is compatible with the unbreakably close and personal union which subsisted from the beginning between Christ's human soul and His Godhead. The least that could be involved as the result of this, the Hypostatic Union, from its inception would be the knowledge in the mind of Christ of His own Godhead and His divine salvific purpose and mission to mankind.

There are two points in which the Modernist doctrine stands out in contradiction to this teaching.

In the first place, the Modernist system, by the very logic of what we may call its root principle, is constrained to speak of the knowledge in the human mind of Christ as the fruit of an exalted religious experience derived from the divinity immanent in Him, and revealing itself to Him. As a result, the knowledge and the experience, although admittedly far above and beyond that which is given to the rest of men, is held to differ not in kind, but only in measure from the knowledge and experience which was common to the prophets, or to the great founders and leaders of religions, such as Buddha, Confucius, Mahomet and others, in whom God was also immanent, albeit revealing Himself in a lower and less vivid degree. The Catholic Church cannot accept this putting of Christ on the same plane, or the upper end of the same inclined plane, with merely human teachers, more than she can accept the relationship between God and these human leaders of religions as so many approximate incarnations. No doubt the Incarnation, as the supreme union between God and man, has its analogies and its reflex in all the lesser relationships of the Creator and the creature, and no doubt God makes a revelation of Himself, by the natural light of reason or by the promptings of His grace, to all men who seek Him in sincerity. But the shadow is not the substance, and that such guidance given by God to His rational creatures should be in any sense comparable or co-ordinate with the infusion of divine knowledge which God the Son pours into His own soul, by His personal union with His Godhead, is felt to be contrary to the unique and incommunicable glory and dignity of the Christ as understood and held by Catholic Christianity.

The second point in which this divergence of principle makes itself felt, and keenly felt, is in the question of the extent of the knowledge in the mind of Christ. While the Church recognizes that the soul of Christ as a creature must be bounded by those limitations which necessarily attach to a finite being—even when admitted to the vision of God—she repudiates any lack or defect of knowledge in Christ, which would be unworthy of the union of the divinity and the humanity in the Incarnation, or inconsistent with the office of the Redeemer. On the other hand, the Modernist governed in his exegesis by his foreign principle of non-intervention, represents Christ as possessing in this human soul the knowledge which might well belong to a highly religious peasant of His age, place and period. It is thus asserted that Christ during the greater portion of His life was utterly unconscious of His own Divinity; that He had no conception of the Church which was to be later on founded by His followers; that He lived and died without any suspicion that He was the Saviour of mankind. In this we have the theory of Kenosis carried to a point in which it becomes destructive of the Catholic concept of the Incarnation. This picture of an ignorant Christ, blundering pitifully over the maze and mazes of His kingdom, waking up one day to make the discovery that He was God, and going to His death without an inkling that by so doing He was saving mankind, or that His blood was the price of man's salvation, is not a Christ which the Catholic conscience can in the least recognize. It is not the Divine Christ whom we and millions of good Christians who are not Catholics have been taught to love and worship, and it is certainly not Christ to whom we could ever bend the knee in adoration. Rather it is a pitiful caricature, from which we turn with indifference, if not with contempt. It is hardly surprising that the attempt to foist upon believing souls as a substitute for the dearly loved Christ and the cherished Christianity which the Church has preached for some twenty centuries, have been deeply resented by faithful Catholics, and about have brought upon Modernism the Church's censure and condemnation.

## III.—THE SENSE-ORIGIN AND INSTABILITY OF DOGMA.

Perhaps the most fundamental and far-reaching of all the differences between Modernism and Catholicism is to be found in the concept of dogma which

the Modernist derives from his root principle as to the origin of religion. The position of Catholicism as to the nature and value of dogma is sufficiently well known and unmistakably clear. It holds that God who made man was pleased to become his Teacher. That is to say, the Divine Intelligence has spoken to the intelligence of man, so that man may be enlightened and sanctified by the divine truth, and to the will of man that man may be won to the likeness of the divine life and holiness. God has thus spoken to the prophets, and through His Divine Son, and His utterance is called Revelation. Man's receiving and believing what God has said to him is called faith. It is the supreme worship in which his intellect, the highest part of his nature, is bowed down in homage to the intellect of his Maker, to be completed by love or will worship in which the will of the Father is done upon earth as it is in Heaven. We may note that as we might expect, the lines of His own work in creation, and having made man intelligent and loving, addresses Himself to his intelligence and to his heart, and to the heart through the intelligence, for we only love what we know. The voice of Catholicism to the nations is therefore: 'Here is a message of salvation, a body of truths which God has taught, and of laws which God has commanded, and because He has spoken them, they are true and holy, and they never can cease to be so.'

In this two things are quite evident. First it is held that the Divine message of revealed truth comes from God in order to be known and understood. It is therefore addressed to man's intelligence, and by this fact it comes from God to an intelligible or intellectual form, and as such, we call it most aptly and appropriately the 'word of God.' Secondly, the revealed truth in its intellectual form (*viz.*, appealing to the understanding) is divine and immutable in the sense that it can never be other than true. 'The truth of the Lord remaineth for ever.' Catholicism recognizes that it is precisely this intellectual form (the intelligible or intellectual character of revelation) that is in question, as some have imagined, of involving any sort of verbal inspiration. All that it requires is that God shall put a truth in the mind of man in order that he may certainly know it, and may be able to communicate it to others; or mind appeal which is the great safeguard of intelligent and reasonable, as marked off from merely sentimental or emotional religion.

Such a body of revealed truth, or dogma, as it is called, is, indeed, necessarily subject to a law of development in the sense that it becomes in the course of the ages more explicit. But by the nature of its origin it is a development which follows the character of revelation, just as revelation itself followed the character of creation, and is therefore a development from truth to truth. That is to say, it is a development which has for its primary term or terminus *a quo* the truth message, as it came from the mind of the Maker, having stamped upon it, and bearing upon it throughout its intellectual form or mind-meaning, the stable and indestructible character which belongs to the Word of God.

Between this and the Modernist conception of dogma, and its development, there is a difference which goes down to the very foundations of the system. The Modernist begins, not with a communication of truth from God to the mind of man, but with a mere manifestation made by God Himself as immanent in the consciousness, to the religious sense. What man receives from God is not a truth-message, but a *feeling* of religious experience. This the Modernist calls revelation, and with it so to speak, God's part begins and ends. But man handles his feeling or religious experience, and, by use of his intellect, seeks to explain it to himself. In doing so he gives it an intellectual expression and transforms it into terms of dogma. Thus the intellectual expression and the transformation are not God's work, but man's own work, and one for which man and not God is responsible. In this way dogma as an expression of revelation is put upon a purely human foundation. The dogmatic truths—the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Resurrection, formulated for belief, become mere human and inadequate symbols which may be helpful at one time and useless and harmful at another. The instability as well as the fallibility of dogma becomes a law and a necessity of the system. Its terminus *a quo* is not truth but sense, and its evolution, in so far as it has any, would not be a development in which something remains the same, losing nothing which it has had while growing fuller and clearer, but a mere succession of transformations in which one intellectual form is cast aside to make way for another. Such a series of substitutions might indicate at most a development of the religious sense underlying the transformations, but it would no more be a development of doctrine or dogma, than the succession of the views in a kaleidoscope would be a development of its first representation.

Readers of Cardinal Newman's *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*—a development presupposing external revelation and proceeding from an original body of revealed truth as a terminus *a quo* by a law according to which all that was first given is preserved, and in which the latest product, to be genuine, must have existed in the original germ—will recognize at once the system that separates this teaching, which is clearly compatible with the stability of dogma, from the destructive sense-transformation theory of the Modernist, which demands and requires its utter instability and, if I may say so, treats Christian doctrines as mere soap bubbles blown by the intellect from the pipe of religious experience. According to this theory, it would be open to any Christian who found himself no longer spiritually helped by the dogma of the Atonement to discard its fact-value and

take simply Christ's death as an edifying example of self-sacrifice, and in like manner to regard the Resurrection not as an historical fact, but—to use the phrase of an eminent French Modernist—as a roundabout way of saying that 'Christ is our contemporary.' Even the Incarnation itself might come to be treated as merely a cumbersome and crude matter of fact expression of the immanence of God in all, but especially in the highly exalted spiritual creation. In this process the whole of the Nicene Creed could gradually be disposed of, under the plea of reaching a higher and more helpful significance, or rendering of the religious sense, and the system would eventually not in the development, but in the dissolution of dogma. The Catholic Church could hardly be expected to stand by, mute and with arms folded, while the whole dogmatic system of Christian faith was being cast into the melting-pot of the Modernists. The Encyclical of Pius X. has struck straight at the whole fallacy, and not so much by any fresh decision, but by re-uttering the condemnation which such errors have already received some forty years ago in the Decrees of the Vatican Council. These Decrees affirmed with the authority of a General Council the great foundational truths—the fact of an external Revelation, the nature of faith as a mental assent, the perpetuity and stability of dogma and the character of true, as distinguished from false, doctrinal development.

A curious form of misconception which seems to have found a place in the mind of some critics in haste has been the supposition that in the recent Encyclical the Pope has condemned the whole principle of doctrinal development. That indeed would be passing strange in view of the fact that this principle, essentially Catholic, is stamped upon the whole face of Church history, and is seen in full working, even in the earliest Councils. It was noted by the Schoolmen, who marked it as a growth from within, and not from without, in their dictum *non profectus fidei in fidei, sed profectus fidei in fide*. It was minutely discussed at the Council of Florence in 1438, and described by its name of 'development' or 'unfolding' as extra-distinguished from accretion or 'addition' from without. It was in fact the chief argument of the Archbishop of Rhodes and of Bossarion in the debates with the Greeks over the admission of the *Filioque*. Its laws and tests have happily received classic treatment at the hands of Cardinal Newman, and its place in the system of Catholic belief has been affirmed in the Dogmatic Constitution

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of the Vatican Council—an affirmation on which the recent Encyclical distinctly lays special stress. Hence the last thing which could be reasonably imputed to the Church or to Pius X. would be any intention to impugn the principle of dogmatic development. Rather it is that just because the principle is so precious and so vital, the Holy See has felt it to be a matter of supreme importance that it should be safeguarded from crude exaggerations, and most of all from being robbed of the majesty of its stability, and thus be deformed and degraded into a mere succession of temporary transformations.

Not a little obscurity has been imported into this consideration by pushing too far and very recklessly the patent distinction between a dogmatic truth and its expression or formula. A dogma may be a necessary truth, like the doctrine concerning God's life and nature, and as such it is eternally true. Or it may be a fact-truth, like the Incarnation, and as such it is everlastingly true. For if it be true at all that God became man, a fact once a fact is always a fact, and not even God Himself could destroy it. So far we may note the indestructible permanence of dogmatic truth in itself. The next question is the permanence of its formulation. The relation between a dogmatic truth and a formula which accurately expresses it, is inherent, and is not by its nature a provisional or passing one. As long as words mean what they mean—and in a stable language and for the overwhelming majority of their number, that will be for ages—said in their historic sense in perpetuity—the bond of expressiveness between truth and formula is in no sense a natural one and cannot be

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