

Podcast - Modernist Infiltration - The Beginnings

Catholicism – Objective Realism

- Catholicism is the objective Truth
 - Aristotelian / Scholastic Philosophy is realist – things really have natures, and can really be known
 - God has made the true religion known (Fact of Revelation is known by motives of credibility)
 - Objectivist Apologetics – its goal is to show that God has objectively and historically revealed the true religion
 - Theology the marriage of realist philosophy and Faith
- Because it can be known as objectively true, and coming from God (Fact of Revelation) the Catholic faith can and must be recognized as true, by individuals and societies

The loss of an Objective sense Truth

- **Protestantism – DESTROYS RELIGIOUS CERTAINTY:** acknowledges that God has revealed in principle, but attacks the principle of authority, leaving us in doubt as to what IS revealed
 - Doctrine becomes unstable, and has a subjective element (“gustus et sapor”)
 - This leads to the impression that that we do is more important than what we think / believe.
- **Kantianism / Modern Subjectivist Philosophy – DESTROYS PHILOSOPHICAL CERTAINTY**

This destroys – Traditional Apologetics – now we really can't know reality of if God has revealed objectively

THEOLOGY HAS TO ADAPT TO THE NEW SUBJECTIVISM

Agnosticism holds that the human mind is incapable of knowing anything about a suprasensible world, even its existence. Immanentism teaches that

the origin and deepest explanation of every religion and of all aspects of religion is to be found in man himself, namely, in the intrinsic disposition and desires of the human soul.

ADVENT OF PROTESTANT MODERNISM

In the 1800's, Modernism already existed within Protestantism due to the influence of Kant.

Kant lays the direct foundation for religious Modernism in his third book, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

- **He denies the historical truth upon which Lutheran dogma was based e.g. original sin and the divinity of Christ.**
- **But He grants them a “symbolic value” as explanations of man's evil tendencies**

HANDOUT 5: MODERNIST CRITIQUE

and man's desire to become a son of God in some way.

But although Kant dabbled toward the end of his life in theology, he was firstly a philosopher. Men after him would draw the conclusions which his system implied and thereby construct a theological Modernism.

Protestant Modernism and Scripture

- The Catholic thinker tests the reliability of the New Testament according to the normal standards of historical criticism, and, finding it satisfactory, accepts as historical
- For him, the “riddle of Jesus” does not exist.
- Once the **thought of Emmanuel Kant**¹ had become the philosophical reference point for most Western intellectuals, rationalists and then modernists attempted a systematic counter-critique of the New Testament.
- = Attempts at systematically “explaining” Christianity and its founding documents while denying any supernatural element
- Kantian philosophy forbids them to acknowledge the existence of a miracle-working, divinely-appointed teacher = a philosophical prejudice
- Since all reliable historical evidence bears witness to just such a man, no matter which road they travel, rationalists and modernists inevitably arrive at historical absurdity.

1. Some claimed christ was a FRAUD

- a political agitator who sought to raise a Jewish rebellion against the Roman empire and was executed for sedition.
- After his death, his followers disguised his real purpose by portraying him as a religious leader of eminent sanctity.
- All the **miracles and prophecies attributed to Christ were invented** by his followers to enhance this portrait. Christians accepted it all because they are “*nothing but parrots who repeat what they hear.*”

2. Others of a RATIONALIST bent say this would assert that Christianity (a world-wide movement of unprecedented historical importance) derived from a combination of lies and naivete.

There must be some real historical event “behind” every miracle. The evangelist was simply wrong in judging that the event was miraculous. All the supposed miracles were medically explainable cures or fortuitous accidents.

¹ Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a professor of logic and metaphysics at the University of Koenigsberg. His most destructive work was **The Critique of Pure Reason (1781)**. This work destroyed Metaphysics by asserting that the object of the mind was not the reality outside it but rather its own ideas. Man was capable of knowing the appearance of things but not the reality of things. God, the soul, and universals (abstract natures) fell into the realm of “maybe.” Truth became defined as the correspondence of the mind with itself.

HANDOUT 5: MODERNIST CRITIQUE

- For example:
 - Jesus did not walk *on* water but merely *into* some shallow water near the beach.
 - Jesus did not multiply any loaves of bread. He shared what He had, and this example of generosity prompted all those present to share the bread that they had brought.
 - Jesus did cure blindness and deafness but through His knowledge of the medicinal properties of certain waters and powders.

Other schools will be influenced by the philosophy of George Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), professor of philosophy at the universities of Heidelberg and Berlin.

Hegel's theory of history as being a process of inevitable progress governed by the conflict of opposing forces (the famous dialectic of THESIS-ANTITHESIS-SYNTHESIS) marks nearly all of Western thought to this day.

3. E.g. DAVID FRIEDRICH STRAUSS

- David Strauss (1808-1874), a professor at the Lutheran seminary at Tubingen claimed that the gospels were a collection of myths superimposed upon the historical Jesus in their fervor and based upon cultural prejudices.
 - ◆ His approach gave birth to nearly all later systems of rationalist exegesis.

At the time of Christ, there existed a “myth” surrounding the Messiah i.e. **A PRE-CONCEIVED AND IDEALIZED NOTION OF HOW THE MESSIAH WOULD BE BASED UPON OLD TESTAMENT JEWISH TRADITION.**

- Jesus really existed and the main events of the gospel are historical,
- But **THIS NOTION OF THE IDEAL MESSIAH HELD BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WAS EVENTUALLY SUPERIMPOSED BY THEM UPON THIS HISTORICAL PERSON.**
- The effect was to **TRANSFORM HIM INTO THE SUPERHUMAN, WONDER-WORKING SAINT PORTRAYED IN THE GOSPELS**
- **In reality he was** when he was **AN ENTHUSIASTIC YOUNG JEW WHO WAS OPPOSED TO THE RELIGIOUS FORMALISM AND MORAL DECADENCE OF HIS TIME.**
- The task of the scholar is to **SEPARATE THE HISTORICAL JESUS FROM THE IDEAL JESUS WHICH THE MYTH CREATED.**
- Mythical elements will include **THE MIRACULOUS, POETIC PASSAGES OR LONG DISCOURSES, AND DIFFERENCES IN THE ACCOUNTS OF THE SAME INCIDENT.**
- While **NOT AN ACCURATE HISTORICAL RECORD OF EVENTS**, the gospels are an **ACCURATE HISTORICAL RECORD OF THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PERIOD.**
- The myth of Jesus is of real religious value as a symbol or allegory of Humanity's own mysterious divinity.

David Strauss leads us to bring up the University of Tübingen. This became a sort of “think tank” or headquarters for the development of Modernist theory.

- In general, Modernism leaks into the Catholic Church from Protestantism through Scripture Studies and Church History (by studying these topics somewhat distant from philosophy and dogma), and Tübingen played a great role in this process.
- The Catholic University of Würtemberg was transferred in 1817 to Tübingen as a Catholic theological faculty. Its faculty eventually influenced by the Protestant scholars living there.
- Tübingen would eventually boast an impressive list of Catholic Modernist alumni: Romani Guardini (1885-1968)², Hans Kung, Cd. Walter Kasper, and Benedict XVI.
- Faculty include Strauss, George Friedrich Hegel, Kung, and Ratzinger.

4. Tübingen School: Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis

We must study of the mindset of the early Christians. The ideal Jesus is the product of the collective Christian imagination which produced Him.

- Christianity RESULTED FROM A FUSION OF COMPETING FACTIONS –
 - on the one hand, **THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN TENDENCY (PETRINE FACTION)** with its focus on **MESSIAHSHIP AND THE OBSERVANCE OF THE MOSAIC LAW**,
 - and on the other hand, the **HELLENISTIC-CHRISTIAN TENDENCY (PAULINE FACTION)** which emphasized the **UNIVERSALITY OF SALVATION BY FAITH**.
- The two factions compromised and merged during the second century (under threat of Gnosticism).

5. “Liberal School”³

Proponents: Adolf von Harnack⁴, Zahn, Holtzman, Schenkel, (Renan)

Time Period: 1867-1930

- The **GOSPELS ARE LARGELY HISTORICAL EXCEPT INsofar AS THEY**

² Leader in the twisting of the liturgical movement. According to Karl Rahner, what Fr. Guardini did with the liturgy at his youth centers was the direct model of the Vatican II reform of the liturgy.

³ *From a Catholic perspective, this school is no more liberal than the others mentioned in this handout (any more than Paulus' school was any more rationalist than the others). The school was simply named for a political term which was fashionable at the time.*

⁴ *Harnack (1851-1930), a Lutheran theologian, was the foremost member of the liberal school. The opinions listed above as representative of the liberal school are his, although some variations existed within the school. Harnack's views are largely summarized in his book **Essence of Christianity (1900)**. Although he still denied the authenticity of St. John's gospel, he raised no objection to the Synoptics nor to the Acts of the Apostles which he dated between 50 and 70 A.D.*

DESCRIBE THE MIRACULOUS.

- The heart of Christ's message was an awareness that **GOD WAS TRYING TO REVEAL HIMSELF TO MEN AS THEIR UNIVERSAL FATHER.**
 - From this conviction arose Christ's consciousness that he was the son of God (in some unique although figurative sense) and, therefore, the promised Messiah.
- Christ's authentic teaching contained **NO DOGMA BEYOND THE UNIVERSAL FATHERHOOD OF GOD**, but it did not last in its purity beyond the apostolic era. Hellenistic philosophy soon disfigured it with a speculative superstructure.

The Frenchman, **ERNEST RENAN**⁵

- opposed the members of the liberal school, but he reached substantially the same conclusions
- the **GOSPELS WERE PARTLY LEGENDARY IN CHARACTER DUE TO THEIR MIRACULOUS CONTENT.**
 - This he excludes by whichever method is convenient.
- Renan concludes that **JESUS CERTAINLY EXISTED AND MUST HAVE BEEN A SPELL-BINDING SPEAKER AND CHARISMATIC LEADER.**
- Beyond that, there is doubt about whether he considered himself the Messiah or even if he was a holy man.
- Renan's works, although popular, were not academically rigorous and were ignored by serious scholars.

Against this Background of Largely Protestant Scholarship, Enter Loisy, Tyrell and Blondell.

Fr. Alfred Loisy (French, 1857-1940)

Critic of traditional view of Scripture

- Brilliant scholar, particularly of ancient languages, but found philosophical too dry and rational.
- Plagued from the day of his ordination with a scruple about the absolute truth of Christianity suspecting some fraud at the origin of the movement...developed into Scriptural skepticism.
- In 1881 he became instructor in Hebrew. Studied more Hebrew with **Ernest Renan** at the Collège de France.
 - ◆ “On Duchesne’s recommendation, Loisy undertook to read Renan’s works in order better to refute him. Unfortunately, contact with the skeptical historian was fatal: far from discouraging our budding young scholar from the path of critique, reading Renan pushed him further still and confirmed his unhealthy tendency. He

⁵ Renan (1823-1892) was a former Catholic seminarian who wrote the extremely popular **Life of Jesus (1863)**.

VOICED A NUMBER OF THE DOUBTS HE WAS ENTERTAINING ABOUT THE DIFFERENT GOSPEL NARRATIVES OF THE NATIVITY AND THE RESURRECTION, BOTH OF WHICH SEEMED TO HIM INCOMPATIBLE WITH HISTORY.”

- By 1890 he was already disillusioned with the **virgin birth** and **resurrection**.
- Specifically denied that the **Visible society of the Catholic Church** was **immediately founded by OLJC**
- Loisy's most famous quote was that **"Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom, and what arrived was the Church"**

7. Eschatological School

Proponents: Alfred Loisy, Albert Schweitzer⁶

- The liberal school errs by projecting onto the historical Jesus its own idea of what Christianity ought to be.
- It is ridiculous to pretend that Jesus of Nazareth was a 19th century (liberal) Protestant minister.
 - **"THE CHRIST THAT HARNACK SEES, LOOKING BACK THROUGH NINETEEN CENTURIES OF "CATHOLIC DARKNESS", IS ONLY THE REFLECTION OF A LIBERAL PROTESTANT FACE, SEEN AT THE BOTTOM OF A DEEP WELL."** (TYRELL)
- The fact is that **THE JEWISH WORLD OF THE FIRST CENTURY WAS BURNING WITH ENTHUSIASM FOR A DRAMATIC DIVINE INTERVENTION WHICH WOULD DESTROY THE CORRUPT CIVILIZATION OF GENTILE WORLD AND USHER IN AN ERA OF PEACE I.E. THE "KINGDOM OF GOD."**
- JESUS PREACHED THAT THIS GRANDIOSE EVENT WAS IMMINENT.
 - When the Jews did not accept his teaching, Jesus persuaded himself that his death would hasten the coming of this kingdom and win him immortal glory.
 - After his death, Christ was deified by his followers.
- Jesus was **NOT A RELIGIOUS TEACHER** in the rabbinical sense at all but **AN APOCALYPTIC ZEALOT WHO THOUGHT THE END OF THE WORLD AS MEN KNEW IT WAS IMMINENT.**
- Any gospel passages which imply that Jesus intended to establish some permanent religious society, new liturgical rites or a definitive moral code must be excluded as unhistorical.⁷
 - **"The historical Gospel amounts to very little indeed, since the synoptic tradition betrays a work of progressive idealization, of symbolic and dogmatic interpretation."** (Bourmaud)
 - **"The apparent realism of the scenes in the Gospel according to St. John is due to the mystical imagination of the author and to the energy of his conviction, which did not allow him clearly to distinguish, in his religious meditations, the ideal from the real, theory from**

⁶ Schweitzer (1875-1965) was a theologian, physician, and medical missionary. Archbishop Lefebvre met him in Africa.

⁷ Loisy went so far as to say that the eschatological theory was the only one which placed Christ into a meaningful historical context. Therefore, if the theory were ever discredited, it would become impossible to uphold the historical existence of Jesus.

history, the symbol from its object. Yet, the fourth Gospel is a book of mystical theology in which we hear the voice of the Christian conscience, not the Christ of history.)” (Bourmaud)

FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH:

- Only after his death and resurrection his original proclamation of the Kingdom was transformed in this sense by his disciples, and legitimately so, as Loisy pointed out against Harnack's conception of Christianity:

“It is certain, for instance, that JESUS DID NOT SYSTEMATIZE BEFOREHAND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH AS THAT OF A GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHED ON EARTH AND DESTINED TO ENDURE FOR A LONG SERIES OF CENTURIES. But a conception far more foreign still to His thoughts and to His authentic teaching is that of an invisible society formed for ever of those who have in their hearts faith in the goodness of God [Harnack]. We have seen that the gospel of Jesus already contained a rudiment of social organization, and that the Kingdom also was announced as a society. JESUS FORETOLD THE KINGDOM, AND IT WAS THE CHURCH THAT CAME; she came, enlarging the form of the gospel, which it was impossible to preserve as it was, as soon as the Passion closed the ministry of Jesus. THERE IS NO INSTITUTION ON THE EARTH OR IN HISTORY WHOSE STATUS AND VALUE MAY NOT BE QUESTIONED IF THE PRINCIPLE IS ESTABLISHED THAT NOTHING MAY EXIST EXCEPT IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM. Such a principle is contrary to the law of life, which is movement and a continual effort of adaptation to conditions always new and perpetually changing. CHRISTIANITY HAS NOT ESCAPED THIS LAW, AND CANNOT BE REPROACHED FOR SUBMISSION TO IT. IT COULD NOT DO OTHERWISE THAN IT HAS DONE” LOISY

- By 1886, Loisy had come to consider Catholicism as an obstacle to the intellectual development of humanity.
- His comparative studies of the Assyrian religions led him to generalize his doubts about Holy Scripture.
- In the end, contact with Kant's writings and Kantian Philosophers caused him to doubt the possibility of any revealed religion whatsoever.
- **In 1894, Battifol, the Institute's secretary, refused to publish one of his articles because it questioned the divinity of Christ. Loisy retorted, with a devilish chuckle, “So you're still hung up on that!”**
- In 1893, Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* (Scriptural Interpretation) was already aimed at Loisy.
- In 1900, two of his books were condemned by the Archbishop of Paris.
- Excommunicated in 1908 (one year after Pascendi).
- In his journal he wrote:

“Christ has even less importance in my religion than he does in that of the liberal Protestants: for I attach little importance to the revelation of God the Father for which they honor Jesus. **IF I AM ANYTHING IN RELIGION, IT IS MORE PANTHEIST-POSITIVIST-HUMANITARIAN THAN**

CHRISTIAN.” — Mémoires II, p. 397

- What troubled modernists was, *How can the Church survive?*

“In the final analysis, the Gospels tell us the story of a man named Jesus who, in the last years of his life, preached the imminence of the kingdom of universal political domination, so long awaited by Israel, and penance as the necessary condition for entering therein. This hope first overtook Jesus as he listened to John the Baptist, and he went on to convince himself that he was the Messiah who would preside over this work at his own upcoming glorious return. He was entirely caught up in this idea of an imminent Parousia and certainly never dreamed of founding a church. He swore to his disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel, drunk as he was on his messianic dreams. A coup d'état on Jerusalem failed, and the insurgents were arrested and condemned for high treason because Jesus had declared himself King of the Jews, a crime for which he was executed. His body was buried in a common grave and never recovered. Roughly, that is what Gospel history teaches us about the life of Jesus, stripped of all legendary accretions. With the stone rolled solidly in front of Jesus' tomb, the historian's work is done.
(BOURMAUD)

Jesus dies. Everything changes. The pre-Paschal cycle, or the cycle of history, gives way to the Paschal cycle, or the cycle of belief. Reality gives way to faith, fact to legend, Gospel to Church. The Church emerges from the Gospel as a butterfly from its cocoon. The first cycle gives way to the second, but the second is not entirely foreign to the first: it continues the first as the plant continues the seed or a reality its symbol. It is contained in the first, even as it contradicts the first.” (BOURMAUD)

If we assume that the truth, insofar as it is accessible to human reason, is something absolute; that Revelation possesses this character and dogma, too, has a share in it; that not only the object of knowledge is eternal and immutable in itself but also the form which this knowledge has taken in human history; then the assertions of the little book [The Gospel and the Church] are more than audacious; they are absurd and impious... A tradition which, like the one focused on the miracles of Jesus, is inevitably legendary... God does not intervene in History... The common idea of Revelation is pure childishness. God reveals Himself in and through humanity. The conscious individual can be considered nearly interchangeably either as the consciousness of God in the world, by a sort of incarnation of God in humanity, or as the consciousness of the world subsisting in God by a sort of concentration of the universe in man.”

George Tyrell (Irish Calvinist convert, 1861-1909)

- Tyrell was born on 6 February 1861 in Dublin.
- brought up as an Anglican, educated in a Church of Ireland school
- in 1879 wandered into St Etheldreda's Church on Ely place. **"Here was the old business, being carried on by the old firm, in the old ways; here was continuity, that took one back to the catacombs."**[1] Converted and was received

into the Catholic Church .

- Enter Jesuits – As early as 1882, his novice master proposed that Tyrrell withdraw from the Jesuits due to a "mental indocility" and a dissatisfaction with a number of Jesuit customs, approaches, and practices; but he was allowed to remain.
- Seems to keep his Protestant tendency for individualism and for intuition over intelligence. *“If I have any gift at all, it is a sort of feminine ability to jump to conclusions without the help of premises, of divining what History should say, of forging hypotheses and syntheses.”*
- Whilst admiring St Thomas, rejected Scholasticism as inadequate.
- He became enamored of German philosophy, Loisy's scriptural theories, and Blondel's immanence.
- His work may be summarized as defending the Faith *against theology*. Revelation is not a revealed deposit of information but an irrational, mystical experience felt by the heart and described inadequately by dogma.
- Expelled by the Jesuits but never excommunicated (?).
- Toward the end of his life, he concluded that the real Christ, who redeemed him and who was God, lay within and that he was himself **“quite cured of the outside God.”**

Tyrrell's Theology

Ecumenism:

“Religion is the spontaneous result of the demands of the human spirit fully satisfied by the emotive experience of God in us. God is not a distant being, far from man. We need to praise the virtues of the various theisms, pantheism and polytheism, for polytheism is a better expression of the divine than anthropomorphic deism. No room for all good qualities in one man. Yahweh cannot be at once Apollo and the Man of Sorrows, Minerva and St. Francis.”
(Tyrrell, Letters, selected and edited by M.D. Petre, (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1920), p.300. Cf. Ratté, Three Modernists, p.235.

On Jesus Christ:

“Are we to frame our minds to that of a first-century Jewish carpenter, for whom more than half the world and nearly the whole of its history did not exist; to whom the stellar universe was unknown; who cared nothing for art or science or history or politics or nine-tenths of the interests of humanity but solely for the kingdom of God and His righteousness”

Revelation

REVELATION IS NOT A REVEALED DEPOSIT OF INTELLIGIBLE INFORMATION; IT IS ONLY AN IRRATIONAL

EXPERIENCE, A MYSTICAL TOUCH FELT ONLY BY THE HEART.

THE VOICE OF GOD IS AT THE SAME TIME THE VOICE OF THE BELIEVER INTIMATELY UNITED TO GOD.

In brief, REVELATION IS A PRODUCT OF THE CONSCIOUSNESS, FOR MAN IS A LITTLE PIECE OF THE SPIRITUAL UNIVERSE AND OF THE SUPERNATURAL ORDER. Here are a few exemplary texts:

“Our best God is but an idol, a temple made with hands in which the Divine will is as little to be confined as our hell-purgatory-heaven schematization.”

“Because man is part and parcel of the spiritual world and of the supernatural order; because in God he lives and moves and has his being, the truth of religion is in him implicitly, as surely as the truth of the whole physical universe is involved in every part of it. Could he read the needs of his own spirit and Conscience he would need no teacher.”

“For, there it is always and necessarily we ourselves who speak to ourselves; who (aided no doubt by the immanent God) work out truth for ourselves.” (ALL QUOTED IN BOURMAUD)

He explained his SYMBOLIC THEORY, “Revelation belongs rather to the category of impressions than to that of expression”; it is not so much affirmation as experience. Dogma is Symbol.

REFORM:

“Official Catholicism is outmoded but we must not abandon it, for it still holds the treasures of the spiritual life on condition that we distinguish between the living faith and dead theology; between the real Church and the governing authority. Judaism was to live a risen and glorified life in Christianity....Well, may not history repeat itself?...Is od’s arm shortened that He should not again out of the

very stones raise up seed to Abraham? May not Catholicism like Judaism have to die in order that it may live again in greater and grander form? Has not every organism got its limits of development after which it must decay, and be content to survive in its progeny?21 The Roman communion may be no more than the charred stump of a tree torn to pieces by gales and rent by thunderbolts; she may be and probably is more responsible for all the schisms than the schismatics themselves, yet, unlike them all, she stands for the principle of Catholicity, for the ideal of a spiritually united humanity centred round Christ in one divine society...; she is at least an abortive essay towards [a] perfect all-embracing religious association....”

Maurice Blondel (1861-1949)

- French philosopher, layman, major works : *Action* (1893) and *Letter* (1896)
- Subjective apologetic method (immanence) just described above is his creation. “*There is nothing that goes into man that does not come from man and that does not correspond in some way with his need for personal growth and expansion.*”⁸
- He insists that this is as far as a philosopher can go, that the supernatural is the real end of man, and that the content of the supernatural is left to the realm of theology. (WIKI)

This attitude was stigmatized by an adversary of Blondel’s, Fr. Tonquedec, O.P., in the *Dictionnaire Apologetique de la Foi Catholique*:

“Despite efforts to base my arguments with Blondel on documentary evidence, I soon realized that the public did not have access to his works. The texts I quoted were from books that were no longer available on the library shelves, nor the brochures that contained his most important articles. Furthermore, his doctrines, in being the continual object of controversy, were continually re-explained, modified, etc., the result being that his doctrine cannot be nailed down or grasped, since it changes with time and circumstances. Very few persons, even amongst those who study religious philosophy, are capable of grasping the meaning of the statements and writings of Blondel and his friends.”

- He says that classical proofs fail to penetrate the minds of modern men, which are penetrated by Kantian positivism. If you want to save souls, then you must go where they are, and if they have fallen into subjectivism, then it is through subjectivism that they must be sought.
- Blondel does not bother with rational arguments to prove the existence of God and the credibility of the Christian religion. He prefers to give the unbeliever an “affective

⁸ Blondel, *Letter Concerning the Demands of Contemporary Philosophy*

experience” of Catholi-cism, to make the unbeliev er who has no faith “act as if he had the faith”; in other words, to “experience” God

Purely Subjective criteria – The Method of Immanence

Epilogue

The Method of Immanence. The whole aim of traditional apologetics is to prove the fact of revelation by objective arguments, in particular by external ones, and thereby prepare the way for a judgment of credibility. Toward the close of the nineteenth century, however, a school of philosophers and theologians, especially in France, maintained that this method is not effective. They claimed that traditional apologetics is of little value, if not absolutely and in itself, at least in the concrete world of facts, because it does not satisfy modern mentality. Such opinions still have a large body of supporters.

The modern mind, according to this school, grows impatient with truths imposed on it from without (extrinsicism); it is not attracted by purely historical arguments that prove the fact of revelation (historicism), but yearns to find in itself and in its own vital action the beginning of the truth it ought to embrace (immanentism). The modern mind has a horror of abstract dialectic, of arguments which belong exclusively to the speculative reason (intellectualism); it is captured far more easily by arguments which appeal to the whole man, which appeal in a very special way to man's volitive powers, to his emotions and will. In pursuing religious and moral truth the modern mind gives a primacy to the will (voluntarism, moral dynamism).

To meet this modern mentality the new school urges that apologetics should begin by way of a psychological approach rather than a philosophical-historical one. It urges the use of the Method of Immanence, whereby apologetics should seek its fundamental arguments for embracing a revealed religion in man's nature itself, in the deepest needs and yearnings of human activity. This apologetics of immanence may be defined as “a method of persuading men that a religion is revealed, based primarily on arguments drawn from the deepest needs of human nature, and adapted to their volitive powers ” (J.*V. de Groot, Summa, p. 13).

The procedure followed in this type of apologetics embraces two steps:

- 1. If anyone examines attentively the intimate make-up of man as he is and carefully studies his thoughts, desires, and actions in their entirety, he will find that man is anything but self-sufficient in spiritual matters. Every man who has not deliberately crushed the noblest aspirations of his nature yearns after an evolution and perfection of religious and moral life which he cannot attain by his own native intelligence and power. There is, therefore, in man as he now**

exists a vague yearning and an inescapable need for a truth and a virtue surpassing his nature, for a supernatural truth and help; in short, for revelation and grace. Apologetics should, then, diligently seek the reasons behind this need and awaken men to a consciousness of them. The purpose of apologetics should be, not to summon from man's own nature a supernatural reality or to determine precisely what that supernatural reality should be, but to make man realize that he ought to love and desire as his own proper good and as a need of his own life that supernatural reality should it be offered. Indeed, if the personal experience of this need is the point where the natural and the supernatural meet, then this experience is a necessary condition for man's acceptance, under the guidance of his will, of the supernatural reality offered from without.

2. Once these things have been accomplished, let the apologist propose that supernatural reality, namely the Catholic Church, together with her doctrines and institutions. Above all let him picture the rich spiritual life to which the Church has always guided and still guides the best of her children. Let him point out that the doctrines and institutions of the Church perfectly correspond to human needs and aspirations; that they are extremely useful for attaining a full growth of spiritual life, and that they make possible a life which one ought to yearn for with all one's heart, a life of incomparable richness which may be found nowhere outside the Church.

Even if it should turn out that a man who has been stirred by the deep longing of his heart to embrace Christ and His Church later encounters the difficulties which rational criticism can raise, he will still cling faithfully to Christ and His Church, because he is joined to them not by the dry bonds of reasoning, but by the living embrace of his entire soul. Still, one may present to him the historical arguments which traditional apologetics usually advances.

Criticism. This apologetics according to the Method of Immanence ought in our opinion neither to be rejected as totally useless or erroneous, nor ought it to be approved wholeheartedly.

The urgent need for supernatural truth and supernatural help is conceived in relation to man such as he now is. We do know that man is destined for a supernatural goal and has been elevated to the supernatural order. Provided, therefore, that the origin of the need for the supernatural which is asserted is not sought for in the very principles of human nature itself,⁵⁵ but in the impulse of the Holy Spirit summoning man to his actual goal, there will be no confusion of the natural and supernatural orders. One might well doubt whether the grace of the Holy Spirit actually arouses in all men, or in most men, particularly in those who are not baptized, a true desire and a genuine need for a strictly super-natural good, or whether it is actually possible to lead all men, or at least most men, to a consciousness of this urgent

need. In addition, there is always the danger that the apologist may imagine he sees in the souls of men who are, so to speak, neutral, his own deep realization of Christianity.

That the dogmas and practices of the Church correspond to the noblest aspirations of the human heart carry weight with cultured and morally good men and at times.

- They are not adapted to all
- The strength of such arguments depends on the subjective and variable dispositions of those to whom they are addressed.
 - For this reason one might fear somewhat for the constancy of a conversion that results from these arguments alone: the greater the role of the emotions in a conversion, the greater the danger of inconstancy.

They do not sufficiently prove the OBJECTIVE FACT of REVELATION.

- They do not directly prove anything except THE EMINENT UTILITY OR GOODNESS OF THE CATHOLIC RELIGION.
- But to be able to conclude with certitude from the goodness of a religion to its divine origin, it should be established that this goodness, this suitability to human nature, this power to perfect human living is so great that it completely excludes any possibility of mere human invention = A MORAL MIRACLE
- To prove this point beyond doubt is no easy matter. And, as a matter of fact, the immanentists themselves pay little attention to doing so. The arguments that they offer may present valid presumptions; they may accidentally suffice for some men; but they do not appear to be strictly sufficient arguments for proving the fact of revelation. Unless the fact of revelation is established with certitude, divine faith, that is, an assent given because of the authority of God revealing, becomes impossible.
- The apologetics of immanence can, therefore, be employed with some usefulness among cultured men. In fact, in the case of men guided by the modern mentality, as described above, such an apologetics may perhaps be necessary to dispose them for the acceptance of the philosophico-historical arguments. But by itself it does not lead to a judgment of credibility which is fully and strictly established.
- In so far as the new apologetics is motivated by KANTIAN principles, it loses all intrinsic and objective value and can be used only as an argument ad hominem. Anyone who holds that the theoretical reason is unable to know objective truth can only grant such power to the practical reason by a bald lack of logic.

Therefore, just as often as you shall show by the arguments of the Immanentists that the truth of the Catholic religion

is a postulate of the practical reason or of the religious conscious-ness, if you likewise acknowledge the theory of the impotence of the theoretical reason, you will have captured a Kantian, but you will not have moved one foot towards proving the objective truth of the Catholic religion. – Van Noort

CONC:

The soul's instinct to faith (Blondel's "immanent tendencies"), are too subjective to be certain and evident proofs of revelation. They are not permanent, and not all have such experiences. Moreover true religious experiences caused by God have natural and preternatural equivalents, which are not easily distinguished from true experiences of supernatural origin. Basing the act of Faith on experience tends to reduce the faith and its causes to the level of natural emotional inclinations, though these may, of course, be steppingstones to the faith.

- *NO NATURAL DEMAND FOR THE TRUTH OF SUPERNATURAL RELIGION OR REVELATION*