

ON MODERNISM (37:19)

Summary

Introduction

§1. Our duty of guarding the Deposit of Faith is more urgent than ever because of the increase of the enemies of the Church and their use of new and deceitful arts for the destruction of the Church.

§2. Another reason for urgency is the fact that many of these enemies are hidden within the Church herself, among its priests and laity, and they are putting themselves forward as reformers of the Church, when in fact they are imbued with the doctrines of the Church's enemies.

§3. They are the worst enemies of the Church, for they destroy the Faith in its very root, imbue every aspect of Christian teaching with poison, employ skilful ruses in their purposes, boldly put forward their false teachings, lead lives of greatest activity with reputations for learning and morals, and refuse any restraint put upon them by authority, as we have proven by experience.

§4. Because they present their doctrines as being disordered and without system, when in fact they are quite set in stone, we are going to expose them in a systematic manner in this encyclical.

§5. To do this, we will cover in order the various personalities that Modernists take on: philosopher, believer, theologian, historian, critic, apologist, reformer.

The Philosopher

§6. The foundation of religious philosophy is Agnosticism (critical doubt).

Epistemological assumption = empiricism: reason is confined exclusively to phenomena.

Conclusions about God from this epistemology

1. If men can only know the things that appear to the senses, and God does not appear to the senses, then man's mind cannot know God, i.e. God can never be proven to the mind.
2. Because God is unknown to the mind, He cannot appear in any of the sciences, which are disciplines of the mind.
3. The following no longer have any value:
 - a) Natural theology – metaphysical proofs of the existence of God
 - b) Motives of credibility – moral proofs of the existence of God and other articles of the faith
 - c) External revelation – propositions of the faith presented to the mind for belief by an outside authority speaking in the name of God

The denial of the validity of these three means for knowledge of God have been condemned separately by Vatican I (God can be known by reason, Dz 1806; expedient for men to be taught by divine revelation, Dz 1807; divine revelation can be made credible, Dz 1812).

Objection to Modernists: You have as a fixed and established principle that both science and history must be atheistic.

But how do you start with Agnosticism, which is just a question of not knowing about God, and logically proceed to Atheism, which is a question of being certain that God does not exist?

Similarly, with regard to history, how do you start with not knowing whether God has intervened in history to knowing for certain that He has not intervened?

§7. Agnosticism is the negative part of Modernism, i.e. what Modernists do not believe.

The positive part, what they do believe, is called "vital immanence", and it is upon it that they base religion. Since Agnosticism shuts off every path to God from outside of man, the only place left to look for God is within man. And since religion is a form of life, then it must specifically be looked for in the life of man.

Starting point of every vital movement: a certain need or impulsion is activated within a man's life by a movement of the heart, called a *sense*. Applying this to religion, which must originate in a man's life, we have the conclusion that religion originates in a need for God in a man's heart. This need is not conscious, but is rooted in the subconsciousness.

Q: How does the need of the divine turn into religion?

A: There are two boundaries, internal and external, beyond which is the unknowable. When a man

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goes past one of those boundaries, the *sense* becomes activated in a man. Within this sense, which is a longing for God, is also implied God himself, object of that longing. This longing for God by the sense and the corresponding feeling of being connected to God, without any operation of the intellect, is what Modernists called **faith**. Same word, totally different meaning.

Vatican I definition of faith (Dz 1789): "Faith is a supernatural virtue by which we, with the aid and inspiration of the grace of God, believe that the things revealed by Him are true, not because the intrinsic truth of the revealed things has been perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived."

§8. Revelation – it is also contained in the *sense*. Since God manifests Himself indistinctly in Modernist faith, He is also revealing Himself. He is both causing faith and is the content of faith.

Corollaries of the idea that God reveals Himself in the religious sense

1. Every religion is both natural and supernatural, i.e. natural in that it arises from a felt need and supernatural in that God is the answer to that need.
2. Consciousness is synonymous with revelation. In other words, being conscious of oneself is the same as learning about God!
3. Since God reveals himself to the religious consciousness of a person, that revelation must be respected by all, even the Church. She must submit to the religious feelings of every individual!

§9. The entire process spelled out: a man encounters a phenomenon belonging to the realm of science or history, a fact of nature, or a person, which exceeds the boundaries of the knowable and so reaches into the unknowable. Faith, discerning the unknowable in the phenomenon, seizes that phenomenon and appropriates it for itself, incorporating the phenomenon into its life. In this incorporation, it does two things to the phenomenon:

1. **Transfiguration** – it raises the phenomenon above its natural conditions, bestowing upon it a divine character
2. **Disfiguration** – it attributes to the phenomenon characteristics which it does not possess

Application to the Gospel story – the Modernists take their principles and apply them to the Gospel story in a method of historical criticism

1. **Agnosticism** – according to science and history, there is only and can only be the merely human in the Christ phenomenon.
2. **Transfiguration** – it was faith that raised Christ above his historical conditions to the divine level. Thus, whatever is reported as pertaining to the divine is to be rejected.
3. **Disfiguration** – it was faith also that added to Christ characteristics not in keeping with His condition and education, and the place and time in which He lived. These characteristics must also be removed.

Condemnation: This method of criticism is strange, says the Pope (it starts with an *a priori* assertion and then blindly derives conclusions without making any other considerations).

§10. Recapitulation of how religion is born: there is a religious sense in the subconsciousness that emerges by the principle of vital immanence, i.e. as a sort of by-product of life. Over time, with the progress of life, the religious sense also makes progress and matures. All religions in all ages originated in this way. In the case of the Catholic Church, she took her origin from the religious sense of the most excellent man who has ever been or who ever will be, Jesus Christ.

Condemnation: This position is a most radical Pelagianism, claiming that the entire supernatural order comes spontaneously from nature. This position is condemned by Vatican I (Dz 1808).

§11. What is the role of the intellect in all of this? To take the obscure revelations of God embedded in sense, analyse them, transform them into mental pictures, express them in words. At first, verbal propositions are expressed in simple, popular language; later, secondary propositions are formed, derived from the first, which are more precise and distinct. Once these secondary propositions are approved by the magisterium of the Church, there is **dogma**.

(It's an entirely bottom-up system)

§12. Dogma, then, originates in simple, popular statements, but in its essence it consists in the precise, secondary propositions. What is the relationship between dogmas and believers? Well, dogma is a means for the believer to give intelligible expression to his religious sense, though that expression will never match up perfectly with the religious sense. Thus, dogmas take on three characteristics as to the subject:

1. They are *instruments*, by which a believer expresses his true feelings, and thus they must

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- be adapted to man's needs of expression.
2. They are *symbols* of that religious sense, approximating it and serving it. Since these symbols are not adequate expressions of the religious sense, they are only images of truth. Thus, dogmas are not true in an absolute sense.
 3. Because they are at the service of the believer and the religious sense, both of which are in a state of change, dogmas themselves are in a process of *evolution*.

Meanwhile, the *object* of dogmas is God, Who is absolute truth and unchanging, but Who also manifests Himself under an infinite variety of aspects. Thus, while He is absolute in Himself, He is never absolute for the believer, and so dogmas expressing Him will change over time, to correspond to His current mode of revelation in the religious sense.

§13. Religious formulas must follow the religious sense, which is a life. Therefore, religious formulas themselves must be living and dynamic. For this to happen, i.e. for them to remain connected to life and vital immanence, both primitive and secondary dogmatic formulas must be accepted, sanctioned, and guided by the heart. They must be tailored to the faith of the individual believer. As soon as they lose this dynamic connection to the heart of the believer, they lose their value and must be changed.

Conceiving dogma in this way, Modernists hold it to be of little account, for it is clear that such dogmas must change constantly, insofar as the heart of man is most changeable. They also find the Church's policy of clinging firmly to the same dogmatic formulas over the ages without change to be ruinous, since they consider those formulas as having become meaningless.

Condemnation: But they are utterly blind in not perceiving that they have perverted the very notions of truth and religion and, in contradictory fashion, redefine truth to be that which is vain, futile and uncertain.

The Believer

§14. The philosopher acknowledges the fact that the believer believes in God found as object of his own religious sense. But the question of whether or not God really exists in another matter, and the philosopher cannot answer that question, since it is a question that goes beyond phenomena. The believer, however, can answer this question and answers it in the affirmative. Because he has had a *personal* experience of God by way of his religious sense, he is certain of the existence of God. Modernists claim that this certainty exceeds both scientific and rational/philosophic certainty. All who have such experiences must believe, and if some have not had the experiences, it is because they refuse to put themselves in the moral state necessary to produce them.

Ruinous consequence 1: Since religious experiences are found in every religion and Modernist make such experiences the entire basis of religion, they must logically hold all religions to be true. For, in their system, they could only declare a religion to be false on one of two grounds:

- The religious sense is false – by definition, the religious sense is always true, because it is one and the same for all mankind; it is part of man's nature
- The religious formula is false – to be true, all that the religious formula has to do is correspond to the religious sense of a given individual, and this can be accomplished by any believer in any religion

Thus, the most that the Modernist can say of Catholicism in relation to other religions is that has better religious formulas corresponding to the religious sense, and thus more truth than the others. But it cannot say that the other religions are false.

Hypocrisy: why do priests who abhor this consequence of Modernism yet praise Modernist teachers?

§15. Ruinous consequence 2: From their doctrine on religious experience, the Modernist derive a new notion of **Tradition**, as follows: a) individual believers formulate dogmas matching up with their religious experiences; b) they communicate their beliefs to others; c) when the listener is a believer, his religious sense is re-stimulated by listening to the other believer; when the listener is an unbeliever, his religious sense is awakened for the first time and he has his first religious experience; d) a community of believers attached to the religious formulas of the initial believer is formed; e) their beliefs are passed on in the same fashion by preaching and books to other peoples and also to other ages.

How do we know that such a Tradition is true? If it corresponds to the current religious sense
How do we know whether it corresponds to the current religious sense? If it stays alive, for the

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religious sense is a life. Thus, all religions that are still living must be true by that fact.

§16. Modernist relation between faith and science:

1. The object-matter of faith is entirely different and separate from that of science. The latter is concerned with phenomena, while the former is concerned with the unknowable, i.e. what is beyond the boundaries of the phenomena, especially the divine.
2. There can never be a disagreement between faith and science when they stick to their own territory.

Objection: But isn't the visible life of Christ an object of faith and hence something that falls under the realm of phenomena?

Ans: The visible life of Christ concerns the historical Christ in His historical reality, and this falls under the realm of science. But the Christ of faith concerns Christ in His divinity, His miracles, His prophecies, etc., which things are produced by a transfiguring and disfiguring of phenomena, and so fall beyond the realm of science. Thus, what is false for science can be true for faith without them being in contradiction!

§17. Nevertheless, faith is not independent of science, but rather subject to it in three regards:

1. Believers have to live in the real world and that is the world that belongs to science. Thus, whenever the believer is not experiencing divine realities, he falls under the control of science, including when he is making use of religious formulas.
2. God belongs to the domain of faith only insofar as He is real. But insofar as human minds try to form an idea of God, God belongs to the domain of science. The reason is that the entire logical order, including the area of absolute ideas, belongs to philosophy, and so philosophy has charge of the development of the idea of God, and must guide the evolution of that idea, as well as bring in line with moral and intellectual exigencies.
3. Since a man does not want to be divided within himself, it is necessary that he conform his faith to the conceptions of science concerning the universe.

Condemnation: Modernists invert the intellectual order. Philosophy is to be subject to theology, as Pius IX remarks.

§18. Practical application of Modernist principles on relation between faith and science:

1. They have no problem advocating doctrines that are contrary one to another. In their writings, one page is Catholic and another rationalist. In their histories, there is no mention of Christ and His divinity, while they clearly profess both when they are preaching.
2. They follow the same pattern in all of their endeavours: whenever they speak as scholars, there is no reference to faith or Magisterium, or rather those are subject to their contempt. Whenever they speak as Catholics, things of faith are treated respectfully and with belief.
3. When they are rebuked for their scholarly, rationalistic, atheist side, they respond by saying that their liberty of thought must not be taken away.
4. They reproach the Church for not submitting her dogmas and teachings to the opinions of science and philosophy, while they themselves seek to construct a new theology which does precisely that.

The Theologian

§19. As theologian, the Modernist seeks to reconcile faith and science, by removing faith completely from the realm of the objective. He does this as follows:

1. Faith is immanent and the principle of that faith is God. Therefore, God is inside man.
Corollary: God being inside man can be understood in a correct sense, but it can also be understood in a pantheistic sense, with God being identified with nature, and this fits with the rest of the teachings of Modernism.
2. The representations of faith are symbolic, and what is represented is God. Therefore, the representations of God are symbolic.
Corollary: Symbols exist for the sake of their objects. Since the formulas of faith representing God are only symbolic, they must be made use of only as long as they are helpful and be cast aside when they no longer do a good job of representation.

§20. Divine permanence: God lives inside believers, and in the body of believers as a whole. This body lives the developing divine life and so, over time, evolves aspects of the faith such as the Church and the sacraments.

Science says that Christ could not have started the Church and the sacraments Himself → they

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must have been started by the Christian consciousness in the body of believers according to laws recognised by science, such as the laws of agnosticism, immanence, evolution, and history. But we can still say, as the Church has always said, that Christ instituted the Church and the sacraments, since Christ lives in the body of Christian consciences → He instituted the Church and sacraments mediately through the Christian consciousness.

§21. Origin of dogma: it “is born of a sort of impulse or necessity by virtue of which the believer elaborates his thought so as to render it clearer to his own conscience and that of others.” It starts off as primitive babbling to satisfy the needs of the moment to give expression to one’s feeling. But over time, more refined formulas are developed, until the formulas are grouped into one body and ratified by the Church’s magisterium as corresponding to the current state of Christian consciousness.

Sacraments: they originate in a double need: a) religion itself needs some visible manifestation; b) believers also have the need to manifest their beliefs by sensible signs and actions.

Thus, for the Modernists, the sacraments are mere signs that satisfy the needs of believers to express their faith; they also stimulate the ideas of believers.

Condemnation: Trent condemned the idea that the sacraments only stimulate faith and do not also give grace.

§22. Scriptures: they are a summary of the experiences of believers.

Objection: But religion is a life and so what is the point of reading a book of dead letters?

Ans: We don’t just live in the present, but we also live in the past and the future. Scripture helps us live in that sense.

Modernist Inspiration: “that impulse which stimulates the believer to reveal the faith that is in him by words of writing”. This is the equivalent of poetical inspiration and is the way in which God stimulated the sacred writers.

Condemnation: this is not a Catholic sense of inspiration and, while it enables Modernists to say that all of Scripture is inspired, it yet empties inspiration of all its meaning.

§23. Origin of the Church: it too has its source in a double need: a) the need of the individual believer to communicate his faith to others; b) the need of many believers to form a society by which they will maintain and pass on their beliefs.

Church: an association of individual consciences which ultimately depends on one first believer, Christ

Authority of the Church – this authority emanates from the collectivity of consciences and is bestowed on the Church by them, and is not bestowed on the Church directly by God. Authority depends wholly on the religious sense, as everything else in the Modernist system.

Democracy – the current consciousness of mankind has a deep sense of liberty. As the democratic form of government is the only form which corresponds to that sense of liberty, then ecclesiastical authority must take that form of government or be a tyranny, to the destruction of the Church.

§24. The same principles that hold true for the relation of faith and science also hold true for the relation between Church and State. Because they have different ends—spiritual ones for the Church and temporal ones for the State—they work in completely separate domains. And because they work in separate domains, they themselves must be separated. Moreover, because of the premises of rational science, it must be held that the interests of the State are superior to those of the Church. Thus, the Church has no right to direct her children in their activity as citizens.

Condemnation: these principles are condemned by *Auctorem Fidei* of Pius VI.

§25. The reason why the Church must be subordinate to the State is that the believer must be subject to science. External acts are the domain of science and the State. Thus, when the Church performs external acts, such as those of the sacraments, they must be subject to the State. Hence follow these ideas on the Church’s authority:

- **Disciplinary authority** – the Church must adapt herself to the forms of the State
- **Doctrinal and dogmatic authority** – both the religious conscience of believers and the formulas which they adopt must be one. The contents of the formulas is given by the will of the people, and the role of the Church’s Magisterium is merely to ratify that doctrinal will, and never to forbid people from expressing their religious impulses or condemn writings. Individuals, meanwhile, must give lip service to ecclesiastical authority, but maintain their

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own opinions.

- **External signs of authority** – these are to be done away with

§26. Evolution of dogma – since religion is living, everything in it must always be in a state of change, and change for the better, i.e. evolution. Unless dogma, Church, worship, faith, and Scripture are changing, they are dead.

How does faith progress? It begins in human nature and then starts to evolve by vital immanence, such that the religious sense develops: a) negatively, by cutting away elements not coming from human nature; b) positively, by refining the religious sense and making it clearer. Prophets especially accelerated the progress of faith, by means of their extraordinary religious experiences.

How does dogma progress? By struggles: the surmounting of obstacles, vanquishing of enemies, refutation of objections; and by striving: the effort to penetrate the mysteries of the faith more deeply. Christ is the greatest example of this striving; He strove so much and faith increased in Him to such a degree that He was held to be God.

How does worship progress? By accommodation to the customs and manners of peoples, and seeing the value in their rituals

How does the Church progress? By adapting herself to historical conditions and harmonising herself with the current forms of society, i.e. by being attentive to the needs of the people of modern times.

§27. Control of evolution – evolution progresses with the proper balance when there is a conflict between two forces:

1. **Tradition** – this is the conservative force, keeping evolution from moving too quickly. It is represented by Church authority, which has the job of protecting Tradition and which is removed from the life of progress and so is able to perform that job.
2. **Progress** – this is the accelerative force, moving evolution to the next step. It is represented by individual consciences, which act on the collective conscience, which in turn pressures religious authorities to move things to the next stage

Modernist disobedience – they believe that they are working for the progress of the Church when they try to update her to the current sensibilities of the religious conscience, and so they are astonished when Church authority condemns them. But they ignore those condemnations, because they believe that they understand the collective conscience better, by their proximity to individuals, as opposed to the authorities of the Church. But they in fact show that they do not know the collective conscience since they actively seek to change it.

§28. Condemnation: the Modernist doctrine on the evolution of dogma was roundly condemned by Pius IX and Vatican I.

§29. It now remains to study the Modernist as historian, critic, apologist, and reformer.

§30. Historian – Modernist historians pretend to approach history without any preconceived philosophy when in fact they have very well defined philosophical principles which they rigidly apply to their analysis of history. The three main principles are the following:

1. **Agnosticism** – history must only concern the human elements of the past; all divine elements are to be eliminated
2. **Transfiguration** – even the human elements of history must be examined to see where faith has transfigured them and raised them above their human condition. All of these additions made by faith must also be eliminated, because they do not pertain to history.
3. **Disfiguration** – the human elements must further be analysed to see where they have been disfigured, i.e. been made inconsistent with their general setting by faith.

All three of these principles are *a priori* assumptions that are completely subjective. Modernists use them to reduce Christ to a mere man and make him say and do only what they would have said and done in his place!

The Critic

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The Apologist

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The Reformer

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Causes of Modernism

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§57. Conclusion