



## **MODERNISM.**

Ever hear of it before? It's time to learn about it if you are not familiar with it. This will be a two-part article on the history of modernism and how neo-modernism impacts the Church today.

Founders: Fr. Alfred Loisy, Fr. George Tyrell, and others.

Dates: 1900 – 1910, 1966 – present.

Principal Errors: (1) God cannot be known and proved by the light of natural reason; (2) external signs of revelation, such as miracles and prophecies, do not prove the divine origin of the Christian religion and are not suited to the intellect of modern man; (3) Christ did not found a Church; (4) and the essential structure of the Church can change; (5) the Church's dogmas continually evolve over time so that they can change from meaning one thing to meaning another; (6) faith is a blind religious feeling that wells up from the subconscious under the impulse of a heart and a will trained to morality, not a real assent of the intellect to divine truth learned by hearing it from an external source..

Background: The heresy of Modernism was inspired by tendencies prevalent in liberal Protestantism and secular philosophy. It was influenced by nineteenth-century studies by Kant and Hegel, by liberal Protestant theologians and biblical critics (such as Schleiermacher and von Harnack), by the evolutionary theories of Darwin, and by certain liberal political movements in Europe. The centers of Modernism were in France, England, Italy and Germany. Two of its leading figures were Fr. Alfred Loisy, a French theologian and Scripture scholar, and Fr. George Tyrell, an Irish-born Protestant who became a Catholic and a Jesuit, though he was dismissed from the Jesuits in 1906.

### ***The Heresy:***

Pope St. Pius X dubbed Modernism “the synthesis of all heresies.” Modernists viewed doctrine not as a means of obtaining supernatural knowledge, but as a symbol of an unknowable ultimate reality or as a symbol of human religious expression. Because they do not contain genuine knowledge of the supernatural, theological dogmas are relative and may be adopted or rejected based on whether they exercise power over people's imaginations. Those dogmas which are found productive to people's religious sentiments are to be accepted, and then abandoned when they are no longer found satisfying. Dogmas may thus change over time, either being completely rejected or re-interpreted and given a meaning different than what they originally had.

Since dogmas do not give us knowledge of the supernatural and religion is best viewed as an expression of human religious aspirations, no real, objective knowledge of God is possible. Intellectual arguments in favor of His existence are useless, as are arguments based on miracles or fulfilled prophecies. In the Modernist view, the only knowledge we can have of God is subjective, found in individual religious experiences (which are binding on only those who receive them).

Since God is found primarily or exclusively in the human heart—in subjective experience—He is profoundly immanent in the world. Modernism has a tendency toward pantheism (the doctrine that God is identical with the world or a part of it), emphasizing His immanence at the expense of His transcendence.

Because theology does not give us knowledge of the supernatural, Scripture is best viewed as an expression of profound religious experiences had by its authors, but not as a sure guide to a knowledge of God and His ways. Scripture is not free from human error and contains much symbol and myth. Since it is historically unreliable and based on human religious sentiment, there is a gap between what it records and what actually took place.

This gap means that there is a great difference between the glorious Christ the Church proclaims (the Christ of faith) and the human Jesus who walked the hills of Israel (the Jesus of history). Jesus did not know (at least for certain) that He was the Messiah or God Incarnate. He did not intend to found a Church. He did not bestow the earthly leadership of this Church upon Peter. Except for Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Christ did not institute any sacraments, and even these have been heavily colored by Christian theological reflection.

***Part Two next week.***

## *Lightning Apologetics*

cont'd from last week: **Modernism**



... In view of the fact that theological dogmas are relative, all Christian denominations are equal with the Catholic Church. Even non-Christian religions are valid expressions of man's religious yearnings. It follows that the Church should have no special relationship with the state and that the state has no duty to uphold and promote the true religion. Instead of openly acknowledging that the state's power comes from God (Rom. 13:1) through Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18), the state should be indifferent to all religions and to those with no religion.

Although key Modernist claims had already been censured by Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) or infallibly condemned by the First Vatican Council (1870), whose status as an ecumenical council was challenged by many Modernists, it was necessary for the magisterium to take new action.

In December 1903, Pope Pius X approved of a decree of the Holy Office that placed five of Loisy's works on the Index of Forbidden Books. Works by other Modernist authors were placed on the Index as well.

In June 1907, the Holy Office published a decree titled *Lamentabili Sane*, which condemned 65 Modernist propositions. Pope Pius X added his censure to this document, declaring each and all of the errors to be condemned and proscribed. In September the Pope published *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, which further condemned Modernism. In November he published a *motu proprio* titled *Praestantia Scripturae*, which bound Catholics in conscience to embrace the decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and imposed the penalty of excommunication on those who contradicted *Lamentabili* or *Pascendi*.

Modernist leaders began to be excommunicated. Tyrell was excommunicated in 1907 and Loisy in 1908. In September 1910, Pope St. Pius X published an oath against Modernism which all clerics before the sub-diaconate, confessors, preachers, pastors, canons, seminary professors, officials in the Roman congregations and Episcopal curias, and religious superiors were required to take. This oath required one to reject the six principal errors listed in this article, to affirm and assent to *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi*, and to reject a variety of other errors, especially those opposing doctrine and history (such as the difference between the Christ of faith and the Christ of history). Only 40 priests in the entire world refused to take the anti-Modernist oath, which effectively ended the Modernist crisis for the short term.

Tyrell died in 1909, depriving the movement of one of its central pillars. As he lay dying he was given a conditional absolution (conditional on his mentally retracting his errors; he was too ill to speak) an extreme unction (what we now call Anointing of the Sick). His friend and supporter, Miss Maude Petre, who cared for him as he died, refused to take the anti-Modernist oath, and was barred from the sacraments, though not formally excommunicated. Loisy died in 1940. In the middle of the century, a strand of Modernism erupted through the writings of Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, leading to Pope Pius XII's 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis*.

### **Modern Parallels:**

Following Vatican II, the Index and the anti-Modernist oath were abolished (in 1966 and 1967 respectively). Modernism reappeared under the influence of theologians and writers such as Hans Kung, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Charles Curran. These clerics challenged papal and scriptural infallibility, rejected Catholic moral teachings (such as on artificial contraception), and began to promote ideas such as women's ordination to the priesthood. Over time, these individuals were censured by the Church and prohibited from presenting themselves as Catholic theologians.

In response to the neo-Modernist crisis, Bl. Pope John Paul II issued in 1992, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the first Church-wide catechism in four hundred years. In 1993 he released the encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor* to correct errors in Catholic moral teaching. In 1994 he issued *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, definitively rejecting the idea of women's ordination. He then came out with the encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, which reaffirmed the teaching given in *Humanae Vitae*. Our present Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, continues the fight against neo-Modernism in our present day. Pray every day for the Holy Father!