

MODERNISM.

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SINCE words in the English language, at best, convey different meanings to all sorts and conditions of men, it may be well to explain one's use of the comparatively new terms "modernist" and "modernism."

Established, if not invented, by its opponents, as the prejudicial designation of a party in the Roman communion, it has come to be synonymous for liberal Catholics. Father Tyrrell, its ablest English exponent, says: "It means the acknowledgment on the part of religion, of the rights of modern thought; of the need of effecting a synthesis, not between the old and the new indiscriminately, but between what, after due criticism, is found to be solid in the old and in the new. Its opposite is medievalism which, as a fact, is only the synthesis offered between the Christian faith and the culture of the late Middle Ages, but which erroneously supposes itself to be of apostolic antiquity; which denies that the work of synthesis is necessary and must endure as long as man's intellectual, moral, and social education endures; which therefore makes the medieval expression of Catholicism its primitive and its final expression.

"Medievalism is an absolute, modernism a relative term. The former will always stand for the same ideas and institutions; the meaning of the latter slides on with the times."

Modernism, then, in this paper, will be considered as a relative attitude of mind toward life and truth and as a temporary working hypothesis, in unifying the thought and action of to-day.

As an attitude of mind, modernism is only the modern label for the openmindedness that has ever characterized the truth-loving nature in its desire to explain experience in terms of thought and action.

This attitude of mind has characterized Christian thinkers from the first attempt of Clement and the Alexandrian school to express the unique Christian experience in the Greek concepts of thought

and life, down to the present when their psychic children are trying to form a synthesis between that same unique experience, preserved in the records and life of Christianity, and modern culture.

To such openmindedness, scholarship is a welcome stimulant to faith, enabling its possessor to give to every man that asks him, a reason for the hope that is in him.

In its corporate life and growth from the small seed planted firmly in human nature, through all the centuries of growth into the tree whose branches and leaves are for the sheltering and healing of the nations, the modernist observes the putting forth of fresh shoots and twigs and the shedding of old bark and withered branches.

At times great branches have been cut off because they were dead, and sometimes the very trunk seemed to die down and new life spring out of its crumbled dust. But careful, intelligent cultivation and pruning by faithful and loving servants of the Lord, has ever caused the tree of life to be as one of the cedars of Lebanon. While differing in expression and often diametrically opposed in the letter, the Christian apologists of Alexandria, the scholastic logicians of the Middle Ages, and the modernists were and are moved by the desire to express the ineffable experience of Christians in terms of contemporary knowledge.

In this living faith that a synthesis can be formed between faith and knowledge, between the intuitions of the human spirit and the evidence of our senses, the modernists share with those who have died in the hope, without seeing the consummation devoutly desired.

In their modest disclaimer to be forming or to have succeeded in forming anything more than a relative synthesis, a temporary working hypothesis, a concordat between faith and knowledge, the modernists share with their predecessors who have endeavored "to prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good."

To a sympathetic critic modernism is a serious attempt to "rightly divide the word of truth" by interpreting the Christian religion in terms of modern learning, so as neither to offend one of the little ones who believe in Christ, nor needlessly to alienate any seeker after truth.

The extreme delicacy of such a task is enough to keep one from the presumption of thinking that he has succeeded, and from the despair of doubting if it ever can be accomplished. The proverbial difficulty of steering between Scylla and Charybdis is only a challenge to the deeper faith of the pilot to find a channel through which he may steer safely to the haven where he would be.

As a tendency modernism is thus seen to exhibit the open-minded characteristic of "every scribe instructed into the Kingdom of Heaven, who brings out of his treasures things old and new," confident that He who hath begun the good work will continue it until the day of Jesus Christ, with the aid of the servants who fearlessly and faithfully employ their talents in the service of the Master, in the Kingdom where

"None but the Master can praise us
And none but the Master blame."

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As a working hypothesis the synthesis requiring construction by modern Christians is demanded by the rise of the scientific and democratic movements of this age.

Because the scholastic conception of theology and ecclesiastical history has been most strongly entrenched in the Latin communion, the stress of modern learning has been more acutely felt therein, but, in so far as the scholastic postulates and assumed facts of history have been accepted by Christian students, the pressure upon received dogmas and institutions has been felt in greater or less degree in every communion.

This fact is recognized by Protestants and Catholics, Anglican and Roman, alike, as shown in Smythe's *Passing Protestantism*, Lillie's *Modernism*, and Tyrrell's *Medievalism*.

Since the thinkers of all schools and communions recognize the breach between traditional Christianity and modern learning, and the modernists are calling for a restatement all along the line, it may be asked (1) How has it come to pass? (2) How is the new synthesis to be formed to restore theology and the church to that proud eminence among sciences and institutions that was theirs in the hey-day of Alexandrian and scholastic thinkers?

The scholastic synthesis conceived the existence of God and His manifestation in the world as transcendent and assumed that the sacred Scriptures were historical records whose narratives could be taken at their proper or face value. So long as authority held sway, all philosophical and political thoughts, as well as natural science, was bound by these assumptions.

The fact that readers of *The Open Court* are familiar with the process by which modern science and philosophy obtained their freedom from the necessity of agreeing with the transcendent view of God and the biblical records, relieves me of the necessity of dwelling upon the subject of how modern science obtained its free-

dom from any other obligation than to seek and speak the truth, bound only by loyalty to its own subject matter.

One by one the sciences obtained their freedom from the control of theology, until now theology asserts its own freedom from obedience to any authority save loyalty to its own subject matter; that is to say, living experience of the God "in whom we live, and move, and have our being."

With the development of the organic sciences in the last century under the stimulus of the evolutionary theory, the transcendental view of God's relation to the world gave way to the present immanent conception, and the individual and collective mind of the human race was explored for evidence of the divine.

It may be well to recall one or two phases in the long conflict between the medieval and modern view as traced in a book like Andrew D. White's *Warfare of Science and Theology*.

First, the progressive view of one generation, where it has survived, has become the conservative view of the next, coming gradually to be the accepted view.

Next, while we repeat the same formulas, use the same symbols, and read the same Scriptures as our forefathers, we do not understand them in the same way, and unconsciously translate them into harmony with the scientific and democratic spirit of the age.

Such being the fact, and I assume that it is fact, modernists have set themselves to answer the question, "How can the Catholic faith and modern learning dwell together in unity in the individual Christian and in the collective mind of the church?"

"For modernism stands for belief in the church and the age and is endeavoring to construct a synthesis which shall be for the enrichment of both, the impoverishment of neither."

It is easier for the radical or reactionary to sacrifice one to the other and henceforth "pass by on the other side," but to do so is to abandon the modernist program.

In the "Programme of Modernism," written by Roman Catholic scholars after their condemnation of the Roman curia, is stated truly the experience of the Christian student of scientific and democratic education. Not that we will not, but we can not accept the requirements of the papal encyclical—its positions are unthinkable.

Does any student to-day take the account of creation in Genesis as literal history?

Can the historical critic accept the traditional order of the Old Testament as real history? Are not many narratives of the Old Testament legendary and allegorical?

Were not the beliefs, institutions and developments of later Judaism read back into its primitive stage?

Modernists accept what used to be called the positions of destructive criticism as assured results and assure us that their position is simply a return to certain half-forgotten principles of which Christian apologetic, in its golden age and prior to scholasticism, had always made use.

As Father Tyrrell (page 366 *S. and C.*) says: "It is no longer difficult for us to believe that 'no man hath seen God at any time,' seen Him, that is, as something external and apart from the world and humanity, or that no man has heard God at any time calling out from the clouds, or from the burning bush, or upon the summit of Sinai. We have long since resigned ourselves to a silent and a hidden God, but have come to recognize our seeming loss as a priceless gain. For now we have learned to seek Him where he is to be found, and seen and heard; near and not far, within and not without; in the very heart of His creation, in the center of man's spirit, in the life of each; still more, in the life of all. It is from the Sinai of conscience (individual and collective) that He thunders forth His commandments and judgments; it is from the heights of His holiness that he looks down in pity upon our earthliness and sinfulness; it is in His Christ, in His Saints and Prophets, that He becomes incarnate and manifest and that He tabernacles with the children of men."

If, in an uncritical age, God's revelation of Himself is conceived as external and described in the language of transcendence, must not such language be consciously or unconsciously transformed to mean anything to minds that in a critical age are filled with the conception of God as immanent in His world? In fact has not such adapting of the language and symbols of the Bible been characteristic of the critical and mystical mind in every age?

All recall how in due time higher criticism applied to the New Testament revealed much the same phenomena as had been discovered in the construction of the Old Testament. As the Pentateuch was composed of four main documents, so the critics found four main sources of the Gospel, only not woven together as in the Pentateuch. From St. Mark's to St. John's presentation of the Christ is shown a progress of belief that requires years of growth from the view of the primitive disciples to the retrospect of developed faith portraying the same life. Being versed neither in natural science nor historical criticism, I am not competent to decide how far the higher critics are justified in claiming similar strata in the growth of the Old and New Testament alike; or whether the dates of the

composition of the New Testament books are late enough for their narratives to be work of developed tradition; but one may be permitted to inquire why the language and symbols of the New Testament may not be interpreted as prophetic, symbolic, allegorical and legendary, if those of the Old Testament are so understood.

The modernists maintain that breathing an atmosphere of immanence and possessing scientifically educated minds renders it an impossibility for intelligent Christians to accept the language of the Bible as scientific or literal revelation.

They also maintain that instead of weakening their hold on the Faith or their devotion to the church, their attitude alone allows faith and knowledge to dwell together in unity, by so modifying theology as to avoid conflict with science.

They claim that, like intelligent defenders of Christianity in every age of transition, they deserve praise instead of blame because they "aim at transferring the rational defense of the faith from the tottering basis of what has proved to be an anti-critical exegesis to the solid because unassailable basis offered by the deeper exigencies of the human soul, and by those spiritual life-needs which have given birth to the whole process of Christianity" (Page 16, *Programme of Modernism*). How the Roman curia repulsed, proscribed and is now trying utterly to extirpate the modernists, needs no telling. That liberal Catholics everywhere have given them aid and comfort and gloried in their refusal to be driven into infidelity or schism is only natural.

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If the controversy of modernism with medievalism were only a family affair of our Latin brethren, it might have no more relation to us than the strife between the conservatives and insurgents of the Republican party in our political life. But while the Latin modernists have some problems peculiar to the Roman communion, Anglicans confront, with their Roman brethren, a situation that requires learning, discrimination, judgment, and above all, sympathy with the best aspirations of our own age.

Modern criticism, in "proving all things" inquires of the church and her traditions, "Are these things from Heaven or of men?" The man of modern learning without faith, replies, "These are of men." The man of ancient faith, without modern learning, affirms, "These are from Heaven!"

The liberal Catholic or modernist replies, "In one sense, from Heaven and not of men; in another, of men and not from Heaven.

The sensible and natural, i. e., the outward and visible, of the Jewish and Christian religion, are of men and constitute the realities of history. The super-sensible and super-natural, i. e., the inward and invisible, are from Heaven and constitute the realities of faith. Both the realities of history and of faith are equally objective but belong to different orders of truth.

“In the Bible there are, strictly speaking, no historical books, but only sacred narratives shaped in great part by the faith in whose service they are written. Even in the Gospels we must distinguish two elements, one corresponding to historical reality, the other to the supernatural reality of faith: Here, as in other parts of the Bible, truth is not always historical truth, but often only historical fiction.

“While in Himself Christ is one, yet He can be considered as the object of history and the object of faith.

“What is revealed by flesh and blood is history; what is revealed by the Father is faith.

“Primitive Christianity was a life lived intensely. The attempt to apprehend the meaning of this life and convey it to others is the course of Christian tradition developed in history and theology.

“In this life of Christ in us, manifested internally by the communication to us of His Holy Spirit, and externally by our fulfilment of His commandments, stands the whole essence of Christianity.

“Because they believed that the unseen Christ inspired them with His own spirit the Evangelists, to better signify the dependence of the developed institution, symbols and sacraments of the church upon His inspiration and guidance, threw back their origin into the very history of the mortal life of Jesus.

“By means of history we see in Him a man who has taught us by word and example; by means of faith we experience in Him the Saviour whose death and resurrection have given us new life.

“Criticism shows us the Christ of history, of legend, and of theology. Faith reveals to us through all ‘Christ according to the Spirit.’”

It is evident that this mystical certainty of modernism rests upon that unreasoned and unformulated experience that is the strength of religion in general and of Christianity in particular.

Accordingly it finds itself in harmony with one of the fundamental tendencies of modern philosophy, in fact with its basic inference—the immanental tendency which assumes that nothing can enter into and get hold of man’s spirit that does not spring from it and in some way correspond to its need of self-expansion. The Bible is the book of life because the individual and collective religious

experience of the race has been so narrated therein that each may find it an anticipation and reflection of his own experience. Its authority is that of truth and life and it lives, not because it records a message from without, but because it is the revelation of God in nature and man. Given the experience to reveal, men uttered it in song, picture and story best fitted to convey the truth. The historical truth of their narratives, the proper value of their words and symbols were probably of no concern to the inspired revealers.

Not the form but the spirit was the essence of revelation. The stories in Daniel, for instance, which are romance to the eye of historical criticism (and probably were so to the writers) are real truth to the eye of faith.

Modernists maintain that "it matters little to faith whether or no criticism can prove the virgin-birth of Christ, His more striking miracles, or even His resurrection; whether or no it sanction the attribution to Christ of certain dogmas, or of the direct institution of the church."

"As ultra-phenomenal, these former facts evade the grasp of experimental and historical criticism, while of the latter it finds, as a fact, no proof.

"But both these and those possess a reality for faith superior to that of physical facts.

"Criticism has destroyed the belief in the formal transmission of a primitive revelation."

While early Christianity may have known nothing of such formal transmission, scholastic theology passed it on to our age and thereby brought on the conflict between science and theology.

Modernism requires us, in the light of modern learning, to reconsider our conception of the letter, not the spirit of revelation.

The Catholic tradition of the faith, once for all delivered, is simply freed by modernism of that view of its transmission which has brought it into conflict with modern science.

The Vincentian test of Catholicity, in the modernist interpretation, harmonizes with democracy when it requires that tradition shall not only be everywhere, at all times and by all, but shall be for the people, by the people and of the people, like the Son of Man, who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister."

This can only be true of the spirit of Christianity which is absolute; not of the letter, which is relative, subject in the past, present and future to development and change to meet the needs of the ever-living spirit.

What is everywhere, at all times and by all can manifestly never

be entirely determined till the Kingdom be fully come and time shall be no more.

To the Catholic mind it seems self-evident that, as Loisy says, "Whatever we think theologically of tradition, whether we trust it or regard it with suspicion, we know Christ only by the tradition, across the tradition, and in the tradition of the primitive Christians."

The Catholic concept that the function of the church, to hand on "the faith once for all delivered," has not been and can not be affected by the critical showing of its evolution.

Modernism, to the Catholic scholar, spells evolution by life shedding the old and useless and putting forth the new and vigorous. To him, Erasmus stands for the true and lasting type of reformer, whose aim is to purge and prune the tree of life that it may bring forth more fruit; not to set out shoots and slips from the old tree to raise a new variety. From first to last he sees phenomena as the manifestation of the Spirit of God working His purpose out until "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" and "God shall be all in all."

If modernism were only an academic movement in the world of thought and action it would call for no practical consideration. But since it offers itself as a very radical reform of the traditional attitude of the church toward the current forms of philosophy and social organization, its claim to freedom of thought and action raises the question of liberty and authority all along the line. For the modernist position extends to the whole general attitude to be taken toward the traditional idea of revelation and of the supernatural and the whole complex Catholic heritage.

Educated as the vast majority have been to consider Christianity and its scholastic interpretation as identical, modernism may well seem, in its critical and anti-scholastic attitude, a grave danger to the integrity of the Christian tradition.

Shall the Anglican Church suppress it by juridical authority as the Roman has done; or, if not by law, shall she lay it on the individual conscience that inability to accept certain articles of the creed and a particular conception of the church as historical is equivalent to renunciation of Christianity and denial of Christ?

Since neither the crisis nor the question are new but have been faced in at least two previous times of transition when new scientific and social conditions required the construction of a synthesis by Christian theologians, let us learn of them!

One only need recall how the work of Clement and the Alexandrian school at the close of the second century, after the usual oppo-

sition and condemnation by zealous but unlearned and ignorant men, became the official apologetic of Catholicism.

Saint Thomas and kindred spirits met with the same experience of opposition and success when, at the close of the thirteenth century, scholasticism was accepted as the official statement of Catholicism.

Of modernism calling for a restatement of Christian experience in harmony with the scientific learning and democratic aspirations of our age, should not authority be content to require fidelity to the faith but allow freedom of understanding of the value of the formulas and symbols?

The unchanging faith of Catholic tradition has ever been in her Founder. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God!" So long as this was believed, the church, in times of transition, has allowed open-mindedness as to its historical mirroring and symbolic formulation.

When one in his heart no longer believes in the Christ nor takes Him for his Guide he ought, in conscience bound, to forsake the communion of the church, as he has abandoned the faith of his forefathers. Since, then, the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; since confessing Christ before men is primarily a matter of Christian living, and denying Him before men is primarily a matter of unchristian living; and since Christian character is the result of "Christ in us the hope of glory"—so that we know by experience that we live, yet not we but Christ in us,—is not the function of authority to guard well and hand on whole and undefiled the unchanging faith in the Christ who ever liveth?

Should we not sympathize with the claim of modernism that one who accepts the Christ of the living present confesses Him before men, even if he cannot accept as historic facts the virgin birth, the resurrection and ascension; and one may assent to every article of the creed and yet have no more faith than a dog?

If past experience has shown us the truth of the second statement, may not future experience establish the truth of the first?

For they rest upon the same law of our nature, namely, that rationalism can neither create nor destroy faith; it can only help or hinder its growth as it frees or hampers the mind in its attempt to apprehend and explain the things which we see through a glass darkly, and so can express only in relative formulas and symbols that have prophetic but not historical values. By requiring loyalty to the essence of the faith and maintaining liberty that shall allow

and encourage open-mindedness in its intellectual formulation, the church will show herself, as in past periods of transition, to be "a social organism gifted with the infallible instinct of every living thing by which, after a period of hesitation and experiment, she discovers those solutions which are essential for her existence."

The modernist Catholic being free from any sectarian desire to have his own way, save as modernism may express the corporate mind of the church, is willing to labor and wait until his movement shall quietly absorb and be absorbed by the church. Shall not the authorities of the church meet them in a similar Catholic spirit, strong in the faith that "if it be not of God it will come to naught?"

Be it understood that this is no plea for wilful arrogance of the son of the church who will not respect the feelings or wishes of his mother but would, in defiant disobedience, assert liberty to do and teach according to his own sweet will. But it is an attempt to sympathetically portray modernism as the reform movement of loyal sons of the church who love her too much to rejoice or be indifferent to anything human being alien from her fold; who would so conceive and teach the faith that no intellectual difficulty in itself may be a bar to the Kingdom from which they would exclude only those "who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

"In preaching Christianity to others or in living it himself, the modernist apprehends and presents it under the same inspired and imaginative symbols as the medievalist." But as philosophers and theologians, the modernist considers all theological formulas as relative and subject to change like any other human hypothesis. Not that he is indifferent to theology but he believes that so long as one lives the life, its correct formulation is a secondary matter, which may well be left to specialists.

This paper may well close with the illuminating words of Saint Augustine (*De Vera Religione*) with which, untroubled in conscience, the condemned modernists of the Roman communion concluded their own "Programme of Modernism":

"Divine Providence often allows even good men to be driven out of the church by the turbulence and intrigues of the carnal-minded, and if they bear this insult and injury patiently, for the peace of the church, and do not start some new schism or heresy, they will teach men with what affection and sincerity of love God is to be served. The fixed purpose of such men is to return as soon as ever the storm is over; or, if that is not possible—either because the same tempest continues, or because their return would raise another as bad, or worse—they resolve to work for the good of those very men of whose

turbulence they are the victims, never forming a separate congregation, defending unto death and sealing by their testimony that faith which they know to be preached in the Catholic church. These the Father, who sees in secret, crowns in secret. It seems a rare case, but examples are not wanting—nay, they are more numerous than commonly supposed.”