

A CATECHISM OF MODERNISM

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by

The Rev. J. B. Lemius, O.M.I.

FOUNDED ON THE ENCYCLICAL
PASCENDI DOMINICI GREGIS
(On Modernism)
By Pope Pius X

“We must now break silence, in order to expose before the whole Church, in their true colors, those men who have assumed this bad disguise.”

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LETTER OF
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL MERRY DEL VAL
TO THE AUTHOR

YOUR REVERENCE :

A high commendation, and, at the same time, an expression of keenest satisfaction is what I have the pleasure of forwarding to your Reverence, in the name of the Sovereign Pontiff, after handing him the splendid brochure bearing the title, "*Catechism of Modernism, founded upon the Encyclical, Pascendi Dominici Gregis.*"

The character of the pontifical document, and the nature of the errors therein condemned, might perhaps render difficult a complete and ready understanding of the important Encyclical in its every detail. I speak for the less cultured classes, and for those who are strangers to the movement of good, as well as of evil, doctrines. Unhappily they fall a very easy prey to all errors, especially when these errors are presented under a false scientific guise. Nor are they, on the other hand, sufficiently wide awake to understand, as readily, the cause of the evil.

Hence you have accomplished a remarkably useful work, by resolving the document into questions, ac-

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according to the simple and plain method of your Catechism. Thereby you bring it within the intellectual grasp of the less cultured.

His Holiness views with complacency the spirited and fruitful work of your Reverence, and he commends you for still another reason—to wit, that you have in no wise departed from the letter of the Encyclical. He hopes to see the product of your timely study obtain a wide circulation, and accords you from his heart the Apostolic Benediction.

Communicating these sentiments to you, I thank you for the copy of the brochure which you have so kindly sent me. With assurance of sincerest esteem, I am your Reverence's

Very devoted servant,

R. CARD. MERRY DEL VAL.

ROME, *December* 14, 1907.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The present translation of the *Catéchisme du Modernisme* of Father Lemius has been prepared with the intention of helping to carry out the desire of the Holy Father that the Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* be made as well known as possible to the entire flock, and to meet, in that respect, what seems to be a real need on the part of our Catholic laymen. The questions dealt with in the Encyclical refer to deep and arduous problems of theology and philosophy, a circumstance which makes the full import of the document difficult to be grasped save by the trained mind of the theologian; whence it is not surprising that the question is repeatedly asked: "What is this Modernism of which we are hearing so much?" This ignorance of the subject on the part of our American Catholic laymen is, at least, gratifying evidence, if such were needed, that Modernism has not in fact penetrated into the ranks of our people, but it is a wise precaution, and in strict accordance with the intentions of our Holy Father, the Pope, to have the faithful put upon their guard against this "synthesis of all the heresies," and to inform them as to its real nature, so that they may be able to detect its subtle presence in

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the various forms of literature that have been influenced by its spirit.

The catechetical method has long been recognized as the most appropriate and effectual when it is question of imparting popular instruction, and it is hoped that the present little treatise may prove a useful supplement to the systematic oral instructions on Modernism which are being given in our churches and academic institutions. The answers to practically all the questions have been taken verbatim from the text of the Encyclical, and thus the learner will have the filial satisfaction of knowing that he is being instructed in the very words of the Holy Father himself. In this manner the Encyclical will doubtless be read and studied by many who might not feel themselves equal to the task of mastering it in its original form.

The text used in preparing the translation is taken from the September-December number of *The New York Review*, being a reproduction of the one previously published in the *London Tablet*.

ST. JOSEPH'S SEMINARY, DUNWOODIE, N. Y.
Feast of St. Gabriel, 1908.

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A CATECHISM OF MODERNISM

PREAMBLE

GRAVITY OF THE MODERNIST ERRORS

Q. What is the first duty assigned to the Sovereign Pontiff by Our Lord Jesus Christ?

A. His Holiness, Pius X, answers for us: The office divinely committed to Us of feeding the Lord's flock, has especially this duty assigned to it by Christ, namely, to guard with the greatest vigilance the deposit of the faith delivered to the saints, rejecting the profane novelties of words and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called.

Q. Was not this vigilance necessary in every age?

A. There has never been a time when this watchfulness of the supreme pastor was not necessary to the Catholic body; for, owing to the efforts of the enemy of the human race, there have never been lacking "men speaking perverse things" (Acts xx. 30), "vain talkers and seducers" (Tit. i. 10), "erring and driving into error" (2 Tim. iii. 13).

Q. Are these misguided men more numerous to-day? What is their aim?

A. It must be confessed that the number of the enemies of the cross of Christ has in these last days increased exceedingly, men who are striving, by arts

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entirely new and full of subtlety, to destroy the vital energy of the Church, and, if they can, to overthrow utterly Christ's kingdom itself.

Q. Why may the Sovereign Pontiff remain silent no longer?

A. We may no longer be silent, he says, lest We should seem to fail in Our most sacred duty, and lest the kindness that, in the hope of wiser counsels, We have hitherto shown them, should be attributed to forgetfulness of Our office.

Q. Where are the "partisans of error" to be found? Are they open enemies?

A. That We make no delay in this matter is rendered necessary especially by the fact that the partisans of error are to be sought not only among the Church's open enemies; they lie hid, a thing to be deeply deplored and feared, in her very bosom and heart, and are the more mischievous the less conspicuously they appear.

Q. Holy Father, are these hidden enemies, who cause anxiety to your paternal heart, to be found among Catholics? Are they found in the ranks of the priesthood?

A. Yes. Many belong to the Catholic laity; nay, and this is far more lamentable, many belong to the ranks of the priesthood itself, who, feigning a love for the Church, lacking the firm protection of philosophy and theology, nay more, thoroughly imbued with the

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poisonous doctrines taught by the enemies of the Church, and lost to all sense of modesty, *vaunt themselves as reformers* of the Church.

Q. Do these lay Catholics and priests, who pose as reformers of the Church, dare to attack Christ's work? Do they even attack the very Person of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ?

A. Forming more boldly into line of attack, they assail all that is most sacred in the work of Christ, not sparing even the Person of the Divine Redeemer, whom, with sacrilegious daring, they reduce to a simple, mere man.

Q. Are those men surprised when Your Holiness numbers them among the enemies of Holy Church?

A. Though they express astonishment themselves, no one can justly be surprised that We number such men among the enemies of the Church, if, leaving out of consideration the internal disposition of soul, of which God alone is the judge, he is acquainted with their tenets, their manner of speech, their conduct. Nor indeed will he err in accounting them the most pernicious of all the adversaries of the Church.

Q. Why, Holy Father, do you call them the bitterest enemies of the Church?

A. For this reason: As We have said, they put their designs for her ruin into operation not from without but from within; hence, the danger is present almost in the very veins and heart of the Church, whose

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injury is the more certain, the more intimate is their knowledge of her.

Q. Are there still further grounds for calling these men the Church's bitterest enemies?

A. Yes. They lay the axe not to the branches and shoots, but to the very root, that is, to the faith and its deepest fibers.

Q. Do they "withhold their hands when they have struck at the root" of life?

A. Having struck at this root of immortality, they proceed to disseminate poison through the whole tree, so that there is no part of Catholic truth from which they hold their hand, none that they do not strive to corrupt.

Q. How do they pursue their purpose? What tactics do they employ?

A. None is more skilful, none more astute than they, in the employment of a thousand noxious arts; for they double the parts of rationalist and Catholic, and this so craftily that they easily lead the unwary into error.

Q. Should not Catholic laymen and priests fear and recoil from the consequences of these doctrines?

A. The consequences should make them hesitate; but, since audacity is their characteristic, there is no conclusion of any kind from which they shrink or which they do not thrust forward with pertinacity and assurance.

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Q. Why are they particularly dangerous and calculated to "deceive souls?"

A. They are indeed well calculated to deceive souls, because they lead a life of the greatest activity, of assiduous and ardent application to every branch of learning, and because they possess, as a rule, a reputation for the strictest morality.

Q. Holy Father, do you hope to cure these misguided ones?

A. This almost destroys all hope of cure: their very doctrines have given such a bent to their minds, that they disdain all authority and brook no restraint; and relying upon a false conscience, they attempt to ascribe to a love of truth that which is in reality the result of pride and obstinacy.

Q. Holy Father, have you no hope of recalling these misguided individuals to a better sense?

A. Once indeed We had hopes of recalling them to a better sense, and to this end We first of all showed them kindness as Our children, then We treated them with severity, and at last We have had recourse, though with great reluctance, to public reproof. But you know how fruitless has been Our action. They bowed their head for a moment, but it was soon uplifted more arrogantly than ever.

Q. Since all hope of reclaiming these enemies is lost, why, Holy Father, do you raise your voice in warning?

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A. If it were a matter which concerned them alone, We might perhaps have overlooked it : but the security of the Catholic name is at stake. Wherefore, to maintain it longer, would be a crime.

Q. *It is now time to speak?*

A. We must now break silence, in order to expose before the whole Church in their true colors those men who have assumed this bad disguise.

Q. *By what name may we call these new enemies of Jesus Christ and of His Holy Church?*

A. They are commonly and rightly called "Modernists."

END AND DIVISION OF THE ENCYCLICAL.

Q. *Give the end and division of the Encyclical?*

A. Since the Modernists employ a very clever artifice, namely, to present their doctrines without order and systematic arrangement into one whole, scattered and disjointed one from another, so as to appear to be in doubt and uncertainty, while they are in reality firm and steadfast, it will be of advantage to bring their teachings together here into one group, and to point out the connection between them, and thus to pass to an examination of the sources of the errors, and to prescribe remedies for averting the evil.

PART I
The Modernist Errors

PART II
The Causes of the Modernist Errors

PART III
Remedies for the Modernist Errors

PART I

THE MODERNIST ERRORS

PRELUDE.

Q. To proceed in an orderly manner in the exposition of the errors of Modernism, how many personalities must we consider in the Modernist?

A. To proceed in an orderly manner in this recondite subject, it must first of all be noted that every Modernist sustains and comprises within himself many personalities; he is a philosopher, a believer, a theologian, an historian, a critic, an apologist, a reformer. These rôles must be clearly distinguished from one another by all who would accurately know their system and thoroughly comprehend the principles and the consequences of their doctrines.

CHAPTER I.

THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF THE MODERNISTS.

§1. *Agnosticism.*

Q. We begin, then, with the philosopher. What doctrine do the Modernists use as the foundation for their religious philosophy?

A. Modernists place the foundation of religious

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philosophy in that doctrine which is usually called *Agnosticism*.

Q. Give the teaching of Agnosticism?

A. According to this teaching, human reason is confined entirely within the field of *phenomena*, that is to say, to things that are perceptible to the senses, and in the manner in which they are perceptible: it has no right and no power to transgress these limits. Hence it is incapable of lifting itself up to God, and of recognizing His existence, even by means of visible things.

Q. What conclusions do Modernists draw from this doctrine?

A. From this it is inferred that God can never be the direct object of science, and that, as regards history, He must not be considered as an historical subject.

Q. What, according to these premises, will become of natural theology, the motives of credibility, and of external revelation?

A. Given these premises, all will readily perceive what becomes of *natural theology*, of the *motives of credibility*, of *external revelation*. The Modernists simply make away with them altogether; they include them in *Intellectualism*, which they call a ridiculous and long ago defunct system.

Q. Do the condemnations of the Church exercise any restraint on the Modernists?

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A. Nor does the fact that the Church has formally condemned these portentous errors exercise the slightest restraint upon them.

Q. *What definition of the Vatican Council may be cited against the Modernists?*

A. The Vatican Council has defined: If any one says that the one true God, Our Creator and Lord, can not be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason by means of the things that are made, let him be anathema (*De Revel.*, can. 1); and also: If any one says that it is not possible or not expedient that man be taught, through the medium of divine revelation, about God and the worship to be paid Him, let him be anathema (*Ibid.*, can. 2); and finally: If any one says that divine revelation can not be made credible by external signs, and that therefore men should be drawn to the faith only by their personal internal experience or by private inspiration, let him be anathema (*De Fide*, can. 3).

Q. *But how can the Modernists make the transition from Agnosticism, which is a state of pure nescience, to scientific and historic Atheism, which is a doctrine of positive denial; and consequently, by what legitimate process of reasoning, starting from ignorance as to whether God has in fact intervened in the history of the human race or not, do they proceed, in their explanation of this history, to ignore God altogether, as if He really had not intervened?*

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A. The matter may be understood from this: It is a fixed and established principle among them that both science and history must be atheistic: and within their boundaries there is room for nothing but *phenomena*; God and all that is divine are utterly excluded.

Q. *According to this absurd teaching, what must be held regarding the sacred Person of Christ, what concerning the mysteries of His life and death, of His Resurrection and Ascension into heaven?*

A. All this we shall soon see.

§2. *Vital Immanence.*

Q. *From what you have just said, it is clear that "Agnosticism is but the negative part of the system of the Modernists." Will you give the positive side?*

A. The positive side of it consists in what they call *vital immanence*.

Q. *How do the Modernists advance from Agnosticism to immanence?*

A. This is how they advance from one to the other: Religion, whether natural or supernatural, must, like every other fact, admit of some explanation. But when natural theology has been destroyed, the road to revelation closed through the rejection of the arguments of credibility, and all external revelation absolutely denied, it is clear that this explanation will be sought in vain outside man himself. It must, there-

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fore, be looked for *in* man ; and since religion is a form of life, the explanation must certainly be found in the life of man. Hence the principle of *religious immanence* is formulated.

Q. It seems that the Modernist partisans of Agnosticism can find only in man and in his life the explanation of religion. Now, to explain this vital immanence, what do they give as the first stimulus and the first manifestation of all vital phenomena, but particularly of religion?

A. The first actuation, so to say, of every vital phenomenon—and religion, as has been said, belongs to this category—is due to a certain necessity or impulse ; but it has its origin, speaking more particularly of life, in a movement of the heart, which movement is called a *sentiment*.

Q. Whence, according to this, originates the principle of faith and, consequently, the principle of religion?

A. Since God is the object of religion, we must conclude that faith, which is the basis and the foundation of all religion, consists in a sentiment which originates from a need of the divine.

Q. Does this "need of the divine," according to Modernists, appertain to the domain of consciousness?

A. This need of the divine, which is experienced only in special and favorable circumstances, can not, of itself, appertain to the domain of consciousness.

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Q. Where is this "need of the divine" latent?

A. It is at first latent within the consciousness, or, to borrow a term from modern philosophy, in the *subconsciousness*, where also its roots lie hidden and undetected.

§3. *Origin of Religion in General.*

Q. Should any one ask how it is that this need of the divine which man experiences within himself grows up into a religion, what do the Modernists reply?

A. The Modernists reply thus: Science and history, they say, are confined within two limits, the one external, namely, the visible world, the other internal, which is consciousness. When one or other of these boundaries has been reached, there can be no further progress, for beyond is the *unknowable*. In presence of this *unknowable*, whether it is outside man and beyond the visible world of nature, or lies hidden within in the *subconsciousness*, the need of the divine, according to the principles of *Fideism*, excites in a soul with a propensity toward religion a certain special *sentiment*, without any previous advertence of the mind: and this sentiment possesses, implied within itself both as its own object and as its intrinsic cause, the *reality* of the divine, and in a way unites man with God. It is this sentiment to which Modernists give the name of faith, and this it is which they consider the beginning of religion.

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§4. *Notion of Revelation.*

Q. Is Modernist philosophy confined to the above mentioned system?

A. We have not yet come to the end of their philosophy, or, to speak more accurately, their folly.

Q. What do the Modernists find in their pretended "sentiment of the divine?"

A. Modernism finds in this *sentiment* not faith only, but with and in faith, as they understand it, *revelation*, they say, abides.

Q. Do they find revelation?

A. What more, they say, can one require for revelation? Is not that religious *sentiment* which is perceptible in the consciousness, revelation, or at least the beginning of revelation? Nay, is not God Himself, as He manifests Himself to the soul, indistinctly it is true, in this same religious sense, revelation? And they add: Since God is both the object and the cause of faith, this revelation is at the same time *of* God and *from* God; that is, God is both the revealer and the revealed.

Q. What absurd doctrine flows from this philosophy, or rather, from this Modernist raving?

A. Hence springs that ridiculous proposition of the Modernists, that every religion, according to the different aspect under which it is viewed, must be considered as both natural and supernatural.

Q. What follows from this?

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A. Hence it is that they make consciousness and revelation synonymous.

Q. *What supreme and universal law would the Modernists derive from this doctrine?*

A. The law according to which *religious consciousness* is given as the universal rule, to be put on an equal footing with revelation, and to which all must submit.

Q. *Must everything, even the supreme authority of the Church, be subjected to this law?*

A. Yes, all things must be made subject, even the supreme authority of the Church, whether in its teaching capacity, or in that of legislator in the province of sacred liturgy or discipline.

§5. *Transformation and Deformation of Phenomena by Faith.*

Q. *What more is requisite in order to give a complete idea of the origin of the faith and of revelation, as the Modernists understand the matter?*

A. In all this process, from which, according to the Modernists, faith and revelation spring, *one point is to be particularly noted*, for it is of capital importance on account of the historico-critical corollaries which are deduced from it.

Q. *How does the "unknowable" of the Modernist philosophy, as above explained, present itself to faith?*

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A. The unknowable they talk of does not present itself to faith as something solitary and isolated; but rather in close conjunction with some phenomenon, which, though it belongs to the realm of science and history, yet to some extent oversteps their bounds.

Q. *What is this phenomenon?*

A. Such a phenomenon may be a fact of nature containing within itself something mysterious; or it may be a man, whose character, actions and words can not, apparently, be reconciled with the ordinary laws of history.

Q. *In this union of the "unknowable" with phenomenon, what is the result for faith?*

A. Faith, attracted by the unknowable, which is united with the phenomenon, possesses itself of the whole phenomenon, and, as it were, permeates it with its own life.

Q. *From this possession of phenomenon by faith, and from the permeation of life, what follows?*

A. From this two things follow.

Q. *What is the first?*

A. The first is a sort of *transfiguration* of the phenomenon, by its elevation above its own true conditions, by which it becomes more adapted to that form of the divine which faith will infuse into it.

Q. *What is the second?*

A. The second is a kind of *disfigurement*, which springs from the fact that faith, which has made the

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phenomenon independent of the circumstances of place and time, attributes to it qualities which it has not.

Q. Upon what phenomena, according to the Modernists, does this double work of transformation and deformation particularly act?

A. This is true particularly of the phenomena of the past, and the older they are, the truer it is.

Q. What laws do the Modernists deduce for this twofold operation?

A. From these two principles the Modernists deduce two laws, which, when united with a third which they have already got from Agnosticism, constitute the foundation of historical criticism.

Q. Give an example of these three laws?

A. We will take an illustration from the Person of Christ. In the Person of Christ, they say, science and history encounter nothing that is not human. Therefore, in virtue of the first canon deduced from Agnosticism, whatever there is in His history suggestive of the divine, must be rejected. Then, according to the second canon, the historical Person of Christ was transfigured by faith; therefore everything that raises it above historical conditions must be removed. Lastly, the third canon, which lays down that the Person of Christ has been *disfigured* by faith, requires that everything should be excluded, deeds and words and all else that is not in keeping with His character, circumstances, and education, and with the place and time in which He lived.