



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ®
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Chancellor's Update

Modernism

Our quest for answers on where to find truth continues. One possible answer is a school of thought that was prevalent in the mid nineteenth century, but was put to sleep in a papal encyclical in 1907. Unfortunately, this philosophy may not have died, but instead may have gone underground, only to rear its head in the late twentieth century. Some descriptions follow.

Modernism, term used by those who affect a preference for what is modern, and a disregard for what is ancient and medieval, usually because they know little of the history or institutions of the past; an attempt at a radical transformation of thought in regard to God, man, the world, life here and hereafter; the assumption that everything modern is more perfect than what preceded, that opposition to every new theory or speculation is opposition to what is good in modern progress. In religion, according to Pius X, it is a complexion of every heresy; according to its principal French exponent, Loisy, a setting aside of every Catholic doctrine. The movement is not new. It began with the Reformation, of which it is the logical outcome. In the middle of the 19th century, under Pius IX, it asserted itself in political liberalism, the attempt to divorce society and government from religion; under Leo XIII it became a social movement; under Pius X it became an aggression against true religion. Its exponents never agreed. It required the genius of Pius X and his collaborators to take their vague assertions and give them system. Modernists were clamoring for emancipation from ecclesiastical authority, for the emancipation of science, of the state, of conscience, without particularizing wherein authority was tyrannical, wherein science, state, or conscience were enthralled. They abhorred the thought of fixed truth, dogma in the real sense, or knowledge derived from revelation. They claimed that the soul had its yearnings for something higher than it could perceive in nature; that these yearnings consciously understood, reveal the intimate presence of God; that this presence constitutes revelation; that experience of relations with God disposes the soul to act properly with Him; that leaders arise who interpret all this and become founders of religion. Christian faith then is this sentimental yearning for God as father, man, as brother. Its formulas are good for a time but they are only of transient use and must give way to others as times change. The Christ of faith is not the Christ of history; He founded the Church and the Sacraments not personally and directly but only through the movement He started as if by a process of evolution; the Sacraments are only formulae which touch the soul and carry it away; the Scriptures are only a collection of religious experiences of great value. The movement was strong in Italy, and it affected many in Germany, France, and England. It had little influence in the United States, although its French and English promoters did all in their power to propagate it,

especially among seminarians. Numerous pontifical documents were issued against it, enumerated in the CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA under Modernism. The Encyclical "Pascendi Gregis" crushed it once for all, and this Encyclical is an instance of the sovereign pontiff voicing a sentiment that was universal among bishops, clergy, and laity, the Church teaching thus expressing the views and wishes of the Church taught. -C.E; Rickaby, The Modernist, London, 1908. (The New Catholic Dictionary, New York, The Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1929)

Pope Saint Pius X on Modernism: The Methods of Modernists. In their writings and addresses they seem not unfrequently to advocate now one doctrine, now another, so that one would be disposed to regard them as vague and doubtful. But there is a reason for this, and it is to be found in their ideas as to the mutual separation of science and faith. Hence in their books you find some things which might well be expressed by a Catholic, but in the next page you find other things which might have been dictated by a rationalist. When they write history they make not mention of the divinity of Christ, but when they are in the pulpit they profess it clearly; again, when they write history they pay no heed to the Fathers and the Councils, but when they catechize the people, they cite them respectfully...

The Cause of Modernism - It is pride which exercises incomparably greater sway over the soul to bind it and plunge into error, and pride sits in Modernism as in its own house, finding sustenance everywhere in its doctrines and an occasion to flaunt itself in all its aspects. It is pride which fills Modernists with that confidence in themselves and leads them to hold themselves up as the rule for all, pride which puffs them up with that vain glory which allows them to regard themselves as the sole possessors of knowledge, and makes them say, inflated with presumption. We are not as the rest of men, and which, to make them really not as other men, leads them to embrace all kinds of the most absurd novelties; it is pride which rouses in them the spirit of disobedience and causes them to demand a compromise between authority and liberty; it is pride that makes of them the reformers of others, while they forget to reform themselves, and which begets their absolute want of respect for authority, not excepting the supreme authority. No, truly, there is no road which leads so directly and so quickly to Modernism as pride. When a Catholic layman or a priest forgets that precept of the Christian life which obliges us to renounce ourselves if we would follow Jesus Christ and neglects to tear pride from his heart, ah! But he is a fully ripe subject for the errors of Modernism....

If we pass from the moral to the intellectual causes of Modernism, the first which presents itself, and the chief one, is ignorance. Yes, these very Modernists who pose as Doctors of the Church, who puff out their cheeks when they speak of modern philosophy, and show such contempt for scholasticism, have embraced the one with all its false glamour because their ignorance of the other has left them without the means of being able to recognize confusion of thought, and to refute sophistry. Their whole system, with all its errors, has been born of the alliance between faith and false philosophy.

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