

THE POPE'S ENCYCLICAL ON MODERNISM.

IT MAY be safely said that few, if any, documents issued by the Holy See in our days have so deeply moved the minds and hearts of men as the recent Encyclical on Modernism. The sound of it has gone forth over the whole earth, and it has been spoken of and written about by all manner of men. The widespread world of naturalist letters and religion has received it in a spirit which displays partly sheer ignorance of its meaning and purport, partly a spiteful hostility, not unlike that of the spirits of old who cried out: "What have we to do with thee? Art thou come hither to torment us before our time?" Many thoughtful men, however, outside the Church have, to the certain knowledge of the writer, hailed the Encyclical as an effective blow struck for right reasoning and dogmatic Christianity. Within the Church the followers of the school of thought whose tenets it condemns have received it in various fashions. Some of them have nobly submitted, thereby proving their good faith; others are still, apparently, holding back, whilst others have gone into open revolt and caused themselves to be severed from the Church. Among these latter, one, the best known in the English-speaking world, has had the arrogance to say in a well-known journal that he disdains to criticize the document, for that would be "to fell the fallen;" and he proceeds to say that he and others have been called down because they mounted the walls and looked out and descried the storm rushing on the building, and gave notice to the sleepy ones inside, with the result that they have been censured and the walls raised, so that those within may sleep on in fancied security. The figure used by this writer may be aptly turned against himself and those who think with him. They have been blamed, not because they saw the storms that have been seen for the past nineteen centuries, but because the false steps they wished to take in order to attain what they considered a vantage ground threatened to make breaches in the wall, whereby the flood would gradually force its way and swamp the whole edifice. Moreover, it is simply ludicrous for any man, and especially for one who has no traditional knowledge of the Church, to pose as a heaven-sent watchman appointed at the dawn of the twentieth century to point out dangers and suggest means of safety to the rock of ages. The overwhelming majority of the members of the Church in all lands have received the Encyclical not only with the deep respect which Catholics are wont to show towards all Papal utterances, but with an unreserved assent of mind and thankfulness of heart. For this Encyclical is especially remarkable for its close reasoning and logical conclusions. It takes its stand on the solid basis of true

philosophy, and thence surveys the sources and the ramifications of the errors of Modernism. The Encyclical discloses and unravels step by step what it rightly describes as a "synthesis of all heresies," and by implication it restates the entire theory of the Catholic religion and sets up a lucid synthesis of doctrine. It is addressed primarily to the *ecclesia docens*, that is, to those charged to instruct and guide souls; but it appeals to the "whole Church," before which it denounces the errors in question. A document of the kind necessarily bristles with technicalities of expression and modes of reasoning which are in vogue in the schools of philosophy and theology; yet its main arguments and conclusions are well within the comprehension of every intelligent Catholic. We hope, therefore, to be of some use to our readers by putting before them briefly some general views on the occasion that has called forth the Encyclical, the nature and purport of its teachings and the grave injunctions which it proclaims.

The causes which have led to the publication of the Encyclical are known to everybody. For the past ten years a certain number of Catholic writers in several countries, men of remarkable but one-sided ability, have been coquetting with the naturalist and rationalist critical methods of the day; and they have fancied that it would be feasible and advantageous to apply them to the Church's teaching, discipline and organization, so as to revise her lines of defense, modify the expression of her mind and reform her very inner life.

The chief centre of this mischievous movement has been in France, and its most brilliant exponents have been found among the younger French clergy. There is something very pathetic in this fact, when considered side by side with the dread ordeal that the Church in France has been going through these same years at the hands of her hereditary and implacable foes. But it has always been thus; the worst scandals have arisen in the midst of the darkest persecutions. It was so for the Church of the Catacombs; it was so in the time of the Penal Laws in England and Ireland; it was so during the *Kulturkampf* in Germany, and it has been so for the Church of France in this her day of bitter conflict and mourning. Rightly, indeed, the foremost of French Catholic laymen, the Comte de Mun, has written of this Modernist movement in France that it has done more harm to the Church than all the brutal persecutions of Combes and Clemenceau. His Catholic instinct has enabled him to perceive what many professional theologians seem to have failed to grasp at once—the fatal drift of the Modernist movement—just as the lay Catholic mind of the Blessed Thomas More saw through the meaning and consequences of Henry VIII.'s Act of Supremacy, whilst many Bishops and priests ignored it, or just as O'Connell saw

through the evil effects of the proposed right of veto which, though favored by many ecclesiastics, would have enslaved the Irish Church. When the noted French book, "L'Évangile et L'Église," was published some six years ago many failed to see its pernicious import. The present writer was assured at the time by a friend of his who holds a very high position in one of the most learned orders of the Church, and who is uncommonly conversant with such subjects, that he had not noticed at a first reading any positive errors in the book. Nor is this to be wondered at, because the many erroneous statements it contained were set forth in an ambiguous manner. Thus there are, here and there through the book, beautiful expressions about the "something divine in Christ," at the same time that we are told that Christ was not conscious of His Divinity, nor did He manifest it in His teachings, nor is it provable from the Synoptic Gospels. The author maintained that the doctrine of the Divinity was read into the early Gospels by the faith and piety of the infant Church, and that these sentiments, grown stronger and stronger by time, led to the compilation of imaginary events and discourses in what is known to critics as the Fourth Gospel—that of St. John. When texts from the Synoptic Gospels embarrass him he does not hesitate to brush them aside as having been interpolated, or, even worse, positively untrue. Thus he argues against Harnack that the text of St. Matthew iii., 17, reproduced by St. Mark ix., 6, does witness to the natural Divine Sonship of Christ; but he proceeds to say that this text is "a product of the Christian tradition of the early times." In other words, the two evangelists have falsified the thought of their Divine Master. In the same way he treats the words of our Lord foretelling the Passion and Redemption, recorded by St. Mark x., 45, as "very probably influenced by the theology of St. Paul," inferring, of course, that the evangelist is unreliable. Of these and numerous other similar assertions in flat contradiction of all orthodox, traditionary beliefs, not an iota of evidence is given; the *ipse dixit* of the writer is held to be all-sufficient. He seems to be utterly unscrupulous in building up his main contention that the Christ of faith is not the Christ of history, and that it would be hopeless to construct or defend the dogma of the Divinity of Christ from the Gospel narrative. How such a writer could claim to possess the faith is one of those psychological problems which the Pope treats of in the Encyclical, and to which we shall have to return.

There is no need to direct detailed attention to the abettors of Modernism in other countries. They are not very numerous, but they have shown themselves wonderfully active. In Italy there has been the pseudo-mysticism embodied in the romance of "Il Santo," a book which would probably have passed unnoticed were it not for

the known school of thought of which it was in part the exponent. The seat of that school was chiefly in Milan, where its activities seem to have been fanned into a flame by the discovery of the now famous letter written by an English member of a great order. In that letter the writer maintained practically that the dogmas of the Church were but forms of expression, with no unchangeable reality behind them, and subject to varying interpretations, according to the subjective views of the individual and the current modes of thought. In England itself there were not many adherents of these untenable views. Rumor had it for some years past that there was much internal dissension among the author's immediate brethren; that some of them were chafing under the disciplinary control of their utterances and were threatening secession. This was no matter for surprise in the case of Englishmen, especially converts, who had been brought up under the influence of the free thought and private judgment engendered by the so-called Reformation and taught to think and speak for themselves unrestrainedly. Germany is the fountain-head and historic home of rationalism and diluted Christianity. It is, therefore, not surprising that there should be found there, especially among State professors, a certain number of nominal Catholics infected by the prevailing *virus* of naturalist critical and historical methods, which are utterly subversive of supernatural truth. The noble and loyal address recently drawn up by the German Bishops assembled at Cologne and sent to the Holy Father to thank him for his Encyclical has expressed the sentiments of the vast body of German Catholics who are so unreservedly devoted to the Holy See. It has been said that in other countries, too, including our own, there have been and are certain upholders of the Modernist's methods and errors. We know not to what extent this statement is correct; if it be well founded, the Encyclical "Pascendi" will effectively stop the emanations and squelch the very germs of the disease.

To come now to the Encyclical itself, its nature and purport. We have already observed that it is remarkable for its close reasoning and logical conclusions. It is also a lengthy document, containing over twenty thousand words; yet there is scarcely a sentence in it which could be discarded without weakening the chain of the argument or marring the serried completeness of the exposition. The introduction is comparatively brief, setting forth the duty of the Apostolic Office "to guard with the greatest vigilance the deposit of the faith delivered to the saints;" the special need of this watchfulness at the present day, when there are found in the very bosom of the Church men feigning love of her, yet so lacking in right philosophy and theology, so imbued with poisonous errors and so lost to

all sense of modesty as to vaunt themselves as reformers of the Church and assail all that is most sacred, even the Divinity of Christ; such men put the axe to the very root of divine faith, and must be regarded as the Church's worst enemies, notwithstanding the personal good qualities of many of their number. Fatherly attempts have been made to correct them, but in vain, and now silence must be broken in order to expose them before the whole Church in their true colors. The introduction closes by indicating a three-fold division of the Encyclical into an analysis of Modernists' teaching, an examination of the source of their errors and a prescribing of remedies against them.

The determined, authoritative character of this exordium cannot be well understood by those outside the Church who have little or no knowledge of the vital importance she attaches to divine faith and to her own mission to watch and guard it. Much less can the analysis of errors which forms the first part of the Encyclical be grasped by any one who has not a clear idea of the nature of divine faith, the grounds on which it rests, its relation to reason on the one hand and to revelation on the other. Even Catholics will do well to refresh their minds on these points so as to follow more readily the argument of the Encyclical. But there is one difficulty which has to be cleared up before entering on this wider field, and that is the meaning of Modernism; and an explanation of it will serve as an introduction to our argument.

Modernism, as interpreted by its votaries and adopted in the Encyclical, may be defined as "the subordination of Catholicism to the progress of modern, naturalist science." This definition will raise up in the minds of many non-Catholics visions of obscurantism, of the Inquisition and of numerous other fancied enormities; and even certain Catholics will blush at the possibility of the Church being opposed to modern progress. The one and the other may be assured at once that the Church, being a living social organism, cannot, dare not be opposed to any true progress of humanity; and it would be her death-knell to anathematize any acquired fact or truth of science. The Church walks with science as far as the deepest science goes; but she knows by revelation from God many things which human philosophy has never dreamt of. Hence the Church can never regard as true progress that which is material to the neglect of the spiritual; that which is natural to the denial of the supernatural; and, whilst she claims that there can never be any conflict between true science and herself, yet she can never subordinate to any human science her higher life and knowledge, which are guaranteed to her by the First, Essential Truth, God. The Church thus rests on two pillars of science—reason and revelation—

twin sisters, not of equal age and strength, but mutually helpful; she needs them both, and she regards herself bound to safeguard the one and the other. In the long course of her history she has had to watch over the workings of reason as well as of revelation, and she has drawn many a sword to save the one from aberration and the other from being misapplied. But reason must always be the Church's first care, since it is the foundation on which her sublime edifice is built. A false philosophy would be more fatal to the Church than a hundred heresies. Hence the first ground of complaint set forth in the Encyclical against the Modernists is their hankering after and adoption of the unsound philosophy of the day. It is well known that in most non-Catholic seats of learning all over the world at the present time there are two fundamental philosophical errors in vogue, the one affecting the will and destructive of all moral consciousness and responsibility, the other affecting the intellect and destructive of natural certitude as well as of supernatural faith. Neither of these errors is precisely modern; they are to be found in the oldest philosophies and will be found to the end. Determinism must always be the philosophy of the natural, animal man left to himself without grace to resist and overcome his passions; and agnosticism is the only refuge for those who deny the supernatural illumination of the intellect, for whom the motto of the ancient University of Oxford, "*Dominus Illuminatio Mea,*" has lost all meaning. To the impartial thinker these errors nullify man's noblest faculties—his intellect and will—and to the Catholic they nullify divine faith. We are not aware that even the extremest Modernist among professing Catholics has adopted Determinism or the negation of the freedom of the will; so we may confine ourselves to the consideration of Agnosticism and its offshoot, Immanence, which have been, unfortunately, flaunted before the world by the Modernists, and which have been so justly arraigned in the Encyclical.

Agnosticism claims that whatever is beyond the field of phenomena as perceived by the senses is unknown and unknowable. Now, this theory denies, in the face of common sense and of the oldest philosophies from Aristotle down, the power of the intellect to abstract from and generalize on the images presented to it by the senses. It thus sweeps away the reasonableness of belief in the existence of God, in the possibility and fact of revelation. Yet the human mind, though a *tabula rasa* at its creation, as Aristotle has taught in his treatise on the soul, has the innate power to occupy itself with questions outside the range of phenomena, such as the question of cause and effect. In revolving the whys and the wherefores of things seen by the senses, the mind naturally discovers a First Cause, who must be a Spirit, since He has created the spiritual soul of man, and who

must be a Person for a similar reason. All true philosophy must agree with St. Paul when he says: "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also and Divinity, so that they (philosophers) are inexcusable." The father of modern experimental science, Nicholas Bacon, has said that there is no *bona fide* atheist; and a far higher Authority tells us that it is the fool who hath said in his heart there is no God.

How any one could adopt Agnosticism, with all its logical consequences, and still pretend to be a Catholic is a knotty psychological problem which we have already mentioned and which has called forth the main argument of the Encyclical. The Modernists, finding themselves in the *impasse*, the dark cave of the unknown and unknowable, where Agnosticism has placed them, grope about for an explanation and foundation of religion, and they fancy they discover it within man himself in a certain sentiment which originates from a need of the Divine which lies hidden in man's subconsciousness. This sentimental need of the Divine they call faith and the foundation of religion as well as the depository of revelation. It can be easily reckoned to what extremes this twofold theory of the natural and supernatural leads its followers. On the side of nature, of history, science and criticism every fact and inference must be subject to the principles of Agnosticism; nothing of the miraculous must be admitted; and on the side of the supernatural all religion, faith, revelation, the Church's magisterium, sacraments, dogmas—all must be subjected, first, to the radical sifting of Agnostic criticism, and then, what is left of them is to be interpreted and received according to the inner sentiments of each one. The Encyclical treats in considerable detail the pernicious consequences that flow from the Modernist combination of Agnosticism and Vital Immanence over the whole field of religion. These consequences are pointed out not as inferences drawn theoretically from Modernists' principles, but are extracted from actual writings of theirs.

It is hard for any Catholic to realize that such perverse errors should have been uttered by men professing loyalty to Christ and His Church. The Encyclical touches on the causes of this extraordinary movement. It does not ascribe it to bad faith, but to a certain perversion of the mind fostered by curiosity and pride. There is nothing so insidious as pride of intellect. To feel one's power in certain lines of thought, to be patted on the back by men of renown, to have one's visions of progress and emancipation blocked by an impassable wall of conservatism—all of this is hard for brilliant minds to bear in the proper spirit. A deeper and more fatal cause of Modernists' errors pointed out by the Holy Father

is their ignorance of scholastic philosophy and their attempted alliance between faith and false modern philosophy. It is the glory of the Church of God to preserve intact the deep-reasoned philosophy bequeathed to mankind by Aristotle, *Il maestro di color che sanno*, and adopted by the genius of St. Thomas for the service of Divine Revelation. Beside it and compared with it, the Agnosticism and Idealism begotten of Descartes and Kant, Berkeley and Hume, Mill and Spencer are but the ravings of partially sane men. The Church will have none of their philosophy; she will never exchange her own solid foundation of certitude and objective truth for those shifting sands of subjective sentiments. It is the privilege of Catholics to-day, as in the past, to know and realize that their faith can face without a blush the scrutiny of true and the onslaughts of false philosophy; that the service demanded of them is what St. Paul calls it, a "reasonable service;" that faith and reason are twin sisters; that faith is no merely-subjective, sentimental acquiescence in certain truths that it does not comprehend. "Faith," says St. Thomas, "presupposes reason, as grace presupposes nature, as the perfect presupposes the perfectible." Grace needs nature for its operations; it needs the intellect to illumine the will to strengthen, and these in turn need the bodily organs for their manifestation and activity. So, too, faith needs reason; it is necessary for understanding the terms of revelation; it judges the credibility of what is proposed by faith. There can never be any conflict between them. For, as St. Thomas again says, "the principles engrafted in human reason by Almighty God must be true; so, too, God's word must be true. Therefore there can be no contradiction between them. God is the author of both reason and revelation. His wisdom embraces both; therefore there can be no contradiction, for contradiction would in such case paralyze all reasoning." What is theologically true cannot be philosophically false, and *vice versa*. The enemies of faith will always be found to be the enemies of reason also. They are represented to-day by the Agnosticism, the Rationalism, the Naturalism, which have made such an insidious attempt to get a foothold in the Church under the guise of Modernism. The Encyclical "Pascendi Gregis Dominici" has given them a backset, from which they will not recover for many a day. All Catholics thank God and the Holy Father for it; they give their hearty assent to all its teachings, their hearty allegiance to all its injunctions, and they fervently pray that the misguided ones may listen to the fatherly voice of Pius X. and take their proper place in the one true fold under his supreme pastoral guidance.

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