

# CATECHISM ON MODERNISM

ACCORDING TO THE ENCYCLICAL  
PASCENDI DOMINICI GREGIS  
OF HIS HOLINESS, PIUS X

FROM THE FRENCH OF  
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OBLATE OF MARY IMMACULATE

BY  
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## **Note**

This catechism reproduces, in its entirety and in the exact order of its ideas, the Encyclical of our Holy Father the Pope “On the Doctrines of the Modernists.”

The text used is that of the official translation published with authority. The divisions and subdivisions are those that are found in the French version issued by the Vatican Press.

Direct quotes from the Encyclical are placed between « and » marks.



# Letter of His Eminence Cardinal Merry Del Val to the Author

(Translation)

It is a pleasure to me to have to address to you, in the Sovereign Pontiff's name, high praise and the expression of his most lively satisfaction on the occasion of my presenting to him your splendid little work entitled *Catechism on Modernism, according to the Encyclical PASCENDI DOMINICI GREGIS*.

The character of the Pontifical document and the nature of the errors therein condemned were of a kind to render difficult the prompt and complete understanding, in all its slightest details, of that most important Encyclical; I mean, for the less cultured classes, who are strangers to the progress of doctrines, true or false, and for those also who, unfortunately, too prone to give access to errors, especially when such are set before them under the false appearances of science, are not sufficiently alert to understand as readily the cause of the evil.

This is why you have performed a task of singular utility in reducing to its component parts the aforesaid document, in the simple yet connected manner of your Catechism, thus fitting it to the capacities of the least cultivated minds.

His Holiness rejoices at the talented and fruitful labour you have accomplished, and, commending you also on the further ground of keeping close to the very letter of the Encyclical, he expresses the hope that the result of your most opportune study will be widely diffused, and he heartily grants you the Apostolic Benediction.

And I, in my turn, having made to you this communication, thank you for the copy of the booklet in question which you have so kindly presented to me, and I renew the expression of the sentiments of profound esteem with which I am your most affectionate servant,

R. CARD. MERRY DEL VAL

Rome,

December 14, 1907

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Chapter 1

## The Religious Philosophy of the Modernists

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### Agnosticism

- Q. «We begin, then, with the philosopher»—*what doctrine do the Modernists lay down as the basis of their religious philosophy?*
- A. «Modernists place the foundation of religious philosophy in that doctrine which is commonly called Agnosticism.»
- Q. *How may the teaching of Agnosticism be summed up?*
- A. «According to this teaching, human reason is confined entirely within the field of phenomena, that is to say, to things that appear, and in the manner in which they appear: it has neither the right nor the power to overstep 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 conclusion do the Modernists deduce from this teaching?*
- 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. *Given these premises, what becomes of Natural Theology, of the motives of credibility, of external revelation?*

A. «Every one will at once perceive. The Modernists simply sweep them entirely aside; they include them in *Intellectualism*, which they denounce as a system which is ridiculous and long since defunct.»

Q. *Do not, at least, the Church's condemnations make them pause?*

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

Q. *What, in opposition to Modernism, is the doctrine of the Vatican Council upon this point?*

A. «The Vatican Council has defined: "If anyone says that the one true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason by means of the things that are made, let him be anathema;"<sup>1</sup> and also: "If anyone 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;"<sup>2</sup> and finally: "If anyone says that divine revelation cannot 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."<sup>3</sup>»

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<sup>1</sup> *De Revel.*, can. 1

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, can. 2

<sup>3</sup> *De Fide*, can. 3

- Q. «It may be asked: In what way do the Modernists contrive to 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 they proceed from the fact of ignorance as to whether God has in fact intervened in the history of the human race or not, to explain this history, leaving God out altogether, as if He really had not intervened?»
- A. «Let him answer who can. Yet 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. *What, as a consequence of this most absurd teaching, must be held touching the most sacred Person of Christ, and the mysteries of His life and death, and of His Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven?*
- A. «We shall soon see clearly.»

### **Vital Immanence**

- Q. *According to what you have just said, «this Agnosticism is only the negative part of the system of the Modernists»— what is, then, its positive side?*
- A. «The positive part consists in what they call *vital immanence*.»

Q. *How do the Modernists pass from Agnosticism to Immanentism?*

A. «Thus 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, and the road to revelation closed by 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 of man himself. It must, therefore, be looked for in man; and since religion is a form of life, the explanation must certainly be found in the life of man. In this way is formulated the principle of religious immanence.»

Q. *I understand that the Modernists, partisans as they are of Agnosticism, can seek for no explanation of religion except in man and in man's life itself.*

*And now, to explain this vital immanence, what do they assign as the primal stimulus and primal manifestation of every vital phenomenon, and particularly of religion?*

A. «The first actuation, so to speak, of every vital phenomenon—and religion, as noted above, belongs to this category—is due to a certain need or impulsion; but speaking more particularly of life, it has its origin in a movement of the heart, which movement is called a *sense*.<sup>4</sup>»

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<sup>4</sup> The Latin word in this and cognate passages is *sensus*, and, of course, we can be said to have a sense of the divine; but 'sentiment' would perhaps express better the meaning of the Modernists.—J. F.

Q. *According to such principles, where is the principle of faith, and therefore of religion?*

A. «As God is the object of religion, we must conclude that faith, which is the basis and foundation of all religion, must consist in a certain interior sense, originating in a need of the divine.»

Q. *According to the Modernists, does this need of the divine belong at least to the domain of consciousness?*

A. «This need of the divine, which is experienced only in special and favourable circumstances, cannot, of itself, appertain to the domain of consciousness.»

Q. *Where, then, according to them, is to be found this need of the divine?*

A. «It is first latent beneath consciousness, or, to borrow a term from modern philosophy, in the subconsciousness, where also its root lies hidden and undetected.»

## **Origin of Religion in General**

Q. *It may perhaps be asked how it is that this need of the divine which man experiences within himself resolves itself into religion. «How is it?»*

A. «To this question the Modernist reply would be as follows: Science and history are confined within two boundaries, the one external, namely, the visible world, the other internal, which is consciousness. When one or other of



these limits has been reached, there can be no further progress, for beyond is the *unknowable*. In the presence of this *unknowable*, whether it is outside man and beyond the visible world of nature, or lies hidden within the *subconsciousness*, the need of the divine in a soul which is prone to religion, excites—according to the principles of *Fideism*, without any previous advertence of the mind—a certain special sense, and this sense possesses, implied within itself both as its own object and as its intrinsic cause, the divine *reality* itself, and in a way unites man with God. It is this sense to which Modernists give the name of faith, and this is what they hold to be the beginning of religion.»

### **Notion of Revelation**

- Q. *What a philosophy is this of the Modernists!—but does it end there?*
- A. «We have not yet reached the end of their philosophizing, or, to speak more accurately, of their folly.»
- Q. *What more, then, can they find in their alleged sense of the divine?*
- A. «Modernists find in this *sense*, not only faith, but in and with faith, as they understand it, they affirm that there is also to be found *revelation*.»
- Q. *Revelation? But how?*

A. «Indeed, what more is needed to constitute a revelation? Is not that religious *sense* which is perceptible in the conscience revelation, or at least the beginning of revelation? Nay, is it not God Himself manifesting Himself—indistinctly, it is true—in this same religious *sense*, to the soul? 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 to say, God is both the Revealer and the Revealed.»

Q. *What is the absurd doctrine that springs from this philosophy, or, rather, these divagations of the Modernists?*

A. «From this springs that most absurd tenet 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 further follows from this?*

A. «It is thus that they make consciousness and revelation synonymous.»

Q. *From this, finally, what supreme and universal law do they seek to impose?*

A. «From this they derive the law laid down as the universal standard, according to which religious consciousness is to be put on an equal footing with revelation, and that to it all must submit.»

Q. *All must submit? Even the supreme authority of the Church?*

- A. «Even the supreme authority of the Church, whether in the capacity of teacher, or in that of legislator in the province of sacred liturgy or discipline.»

## **Transfiguration and Disfiguration of Phenomena Through Faith**

*Q. What more is necessary in order to give a complete idea of the origin of faith and revelation, as these are understood by the Modernists?*

- 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 they deduce from it.»

*Q. How does the Unknowable of the Modernist philosophy, as this has been above explained, present itself to faith?*

- A. «The *Unknowable* they speak of does not present itself to faith as something solitary and isolated; but, on the contrary, in close conjunction with some phenomenon, which, though it belongs to the realms of science or history, yet to some extent exceeds their limits.»

*Q. What phenomenon do you mean?*

- 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 cannot, apparently, be reconciled with the ordinary laws of history.»

Q. *From the fact of this connection between the Unknowable and some phenomenon, what happens to faith?*

A. «Faith, attracted by the *Unknowable* which is united with the phenomenon, seizes upon the whole phenomenon, and, as it were, permeates it with its own life.»

Q. *What follows from this extension of faith to the phenomenon and this penetrating it with life?*

A. «From this two things follow.»

Q. *What is the first consequence?*

A. «The first is a sort of *transfiguration* of the phenomenon, by its elevation above its own true conditions—an elevation by which it becomes more adapted to clothe itself with the form of the divine character which faith will bestow upon it.»

Q. *What is the second consequence?*

A. «The second consequence is a certain *disfiguration* so it may be called of the same phenomenon, arising from the fact that faith attributes to it, when stripped of the circumstances of place and time, characteristics which it does not really possess.»

Q. *In the case of what phenomena, particularly, according to the Modernists, does this double operation of transfiguration and disfiguration take place?*

A. «This takes place especially in the case of the phenomena of the past, and the more fully in the measure of their antiquity.»

Q. *And, what laws do the Modernists deduce from this double operation?*

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

Q. *Can you explain to us these three laws by an example?*

A. «An example may be sought in 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 strict keeping with His character, condition, and education, and with the place and time in which He lived.»

Q. *What kind of reasoning is that?*

A. «A method of reasoning which is passing strange, but in it we have the Modernist criticism.»

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