

THE MODERNIST CRISIS HALF A CENTURY LATER

A few years ago a Cambridge don described an altercation between two knife-wielding English youth gangs wherein one of the participants objected to a bystander, "Don't call them Teddy boys, gov'ner; they was Modernists."¹ This incident is recalled here not to suggest that the Modernist crisis in the Church had quite those sanguinary potentialities. It is rather to indicate at least briefly how the word, in the sense attributed to it by theologians and historians, is rather closely confined to those two groups of specialists. Ask any even well-informed Catholic about Modernism or Loisy today and you are rather likely to be met by the same kind of stare of incomprehension that a reference to Priscillianism or to Paul of Samosata would occasion. Yet, in its day, and that day was little more than fifty years ago, Modernism was considered the gravest of crises for the Church, while Alfred Loisy, regarded at the beginning of the twentieth century as the Modernist *par excellence*, died as recently as the Second World War, in 1940 to be exact.

Even within a few years of the condemnation of 1907² and the counter-Modernist oath of 1910,³ the movement as a movement was for all practical purposes moribund, despite the over-reactionist worries of some individuals and some groups which saw Modernism anywhere and everywhere for some time yet to come. The First World War and its ensuing problems all but pushed Modernism into the limbo between history and current events. Despite Rivière's

¹ A. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present Day* (Hammondsworth, England, 1961), 178.

² *Decretum Sancti Officii*, "Lamentabili," July 3, 1907, ASS, 40 (1907), 470 ff. and H. Denzinger, S.J. and A. Schönmetzer, S.J., *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Editio 32 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1963), nn. 3401-3466. This latter collection will hereinafter be referred to simply by letters and numbers as follows, e.g., DS 3401-3466. *Litterae Encyclicae*, "Pascendi dominici gregis," September 8, 1907, ASS, 40 (1907), 596 ff. and DS 3475-3500.

³ *Litterae motu proprio*, "Sacrorum antistites," Sept. 1, 1910, AAS 2 (1910), 669 ff. and DS 3537-3550.

basic work on the movement, published in the 1920s,⁴ it is only recently, within the past ten years, that scholarship, both historical and theological, has begun to engage in a serious re-examination of the phenomenon and its protagonists.

The nature of this paper will preclude, of course, any extended treatment in depth of Modernism. It hopes, rather, to present from a historical point of view, first, some of the background to the movement, without which much of what happened is, and remains, unintelligible. Secondly, moving to more recent times, the paper will discuss some of the present scholarly work being done, and suggest possible avenues of future research. In between, there will be a brief sketch of the crisis itself and of some reactions to it. This will be brief because some familiarity with those incidents can surely be assumed here. Such background information and such continued research are necessary as an antecedent to a definitive and complete study of Modernism, and though serious theological endeavor is much needed as part of this research, it will be of lasting value only insofar as it is preceded or at least accompanied by truly adequate historical studies. Otherwise it will be an exercise of speculation in a vacuum.

Though the French Revolution and its accompanying upheavals did not leave a complete void in the intellectual life of the Church, nonetheless the widespread lack of serious scholarship on every level in early and mid-nineteenth century Catholicism is a phenomenon remarked on by almost every historian who writes on the period.⁵ The eighteenth century intellectual vitality of the Church, especially in theology, had not been of the highest in any case, and the Revolution compounded the problem for the nineteenth century by destroying on the continent much of the institutional structure of the Church, a structure which might perhaps have provided a place of nurture for a revival of theology after the storm. The Catholicism of the English speaking lands, on the other hand, was leading at best a

⁴ J. Rivière, *Le modernisme dans l'église* (Paris, 1929).

⁵ Cf. for example two of the best volumes of church history on that period: J. Leflon, *La crise révolutionnaire (1789-1846)* and R. Aubert, *Le pontificat de Pie IX (1846-1878)*. They are volumes 20 and 21 in the *Histoire de l'église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris).

precarious existence with no time, energy, inclination or capability for sustained and organized study. The Church, just as Abbé Sieyès, who answered when asked what he had been doing during the Revolution, "had survived," and it might from many points of view equally have counted itself fortunate to have done so.

What was the Church like, especially in the country in which the Modernist crisis was to be most severe? Though the great French novelist, Stendhal, is hardly an unbiased witness, still it would do a world of good for any serious scholar of the immediately post-revolutionary clerical education to read in *Le rouge et le noir* the chapters on the incredible rigorism on the one hand and the rampant time-serving hypocrisy on the other hand at the seminary in which the hero of the novel, Julien Sorel, lived for some time.⁶ The picture is surely exaggerated in detail, but not in substance. As for the intellectual training of ecclesiastics, the attractions of Lamennais, of traditionalism, of fideism, to many a spirit are not hard to understand as a reaction when we learn, to cite but one instance from a restoration seminary syllabus, that even for the best of minor seminaries philosophy was to proceed

from consequence to consequence, from the first principle of reasoning and from certitude, all the way to the Christian religion, all the way to the Catholic Church, and [the teachers are] properly to convince [the students] that it is not possible to reason consistently without arriving at this last term of all the investigations of a man of good will.⁷

Even thirty years later, in the 1850s, in a textbook of philosophy widely used in colleges and seminaries then and for many years after this date, we learn that

everywhere there has been a rank growth of sophists who in ordinary discourse and in their writings try in a mad fury to blot out every notion of the true and the honorable, and to tear down every principle of faith and morals. . . . Heedless youth are often deceived by 'their philosophy and empty

⁶ Cf. Stendahl, *The Red and the Black*, Trans. by C. Tergie (New York, 1961), 157-191. These are chapters 25 through 29.

⁷ *Archives of the Paris Province of the Society of Jesus/2220*, N. Loriguet, S.J., *Annales du petit-séminaire de St. Acheul* (Manuscript copy), 817.

fallacies, drawn from human tradition and from worldly principles, and not from Christ' (Colossians 2:8). Against such a terrible infection, spreading wider every day, the most effective antidote is the study of philosophy as usually taught in Christian schools. Experience proves that they who are versed in this subject are not easily deceived, and that, habituated to accurate rules of reasoning, they know how to detect the teachings of an adulterine philosophy, overcome the wicked enemies of religion and refute their godless systems.⁸

As with philosophy, so too with theology, the aim was for a long time almost exclusively apologetic; the courses were most often very rationalistically orientated, and the carrying out of such a program was sometimes rather incoherent. Again, one brief example will have to suffice here. In minor seminaries, Feller's *Catéchisme philosophique* was regularly used and, as the author said, "If in certain places it [seemed] too simple and too ordinary, it should be remembered that it was a catechism; if in others it seemed too erudite, it should be realized that it was a philosophical catechism."⁹ But concurrently with this quite rationalistic text for students, to the teachers here and in major seminaries was recommended for their own class preparation and personal study a work such as Bergier's *Dictionnaire théologique*.¹⁰ This was also an eighteenth century work often reprinted in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, imbued with a theology of traditionalism and seemingly emphasizing a universal interior sentiment as the best proof for the

⁸ P. Fournier, S.J., *Institutiones philosophicae ad usum praelectionum in collegiis et seminariis* (Paris, 1854), 3-4. Cf. also the general study by L. Foucher, *La philosophie catholique en France au XIX^e siècle: Avant la renaissance thomiste et dans ses rapports avec elle, 1810-1880* (Paris, 1955). The work deals at some length with the authoritarian current in Catholic philosophy in France during those years.

⁹ F.-X. Feller, *Catéchisme philosophique, un recueil d'observations propres à défendre la religion chrétienne contre ses ennemis*, 5th ed. (Paris et Lyon, 1821), I, 5. The author had been a Jesuit before the suppression of the Society. The first edition of the book was published in 1772 at Liege with the author listed as Flexier de Reval, an anagram of Feller's name.

¹⁰ N. Bergier, *Dictionnaire théologique* (Paris, 1788). In the nineteenth century, Archbishop, later Cardinal, Gousset of Reims prepared a revision (Lille, 1838), which was followed by other editions in 1852 and 1859. Somewhat ironically, P.-J. Proudhon, the convinced socialist and ardent anti-clerical, was involved in the details of publication of at least one of these editions.

faith. Again, no wonder that, either in reaction or in acquiescence, some of the theories of the Frenchmen, Lamennais, Bautain and Bonnetty, and of their opposites, the Germans, Günther and Hermes, were widespread.

Lastly, the heavily apologetic approach extended to the study and teaching of history, too. The remark is typical that a history course was

of great importance, not only for the . . . [degree], but also from the religious point of view, to form the minds and hearts of our students, to give them correct ideas on essential points, even and especially on religion, too often wrongly judged by the greater number of historians. A course in history well done is almost a good course in religion.¹¹

Yet it was precisely in these three areas of theology, philosophy and history that the nineteenth century Protestant intellectual world was stirring. But it was doing so in an atmosphere inherited from the eighteenth century, wherein Pietism had preceded Kant very shortly. In the background of pietistic influences and of Kantian rationalist idealism, religious truth as truth had been cut from its intellectual moorings. Progressing through Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Harnack, the conceptual enunciation of a religious experience had become simply that and that alone, a construct of the human mind without having in itself an objective content or an objective foundation in any other than the pure experience itself. A religious statement might be expressive of a religious intuition or it might be a symbolic enunciation of a religious sentiment, but it was not an intellectual enunciation of an objective reality.

To this combination was added one last element which produced the critical mass necessary for the beginning of the modernist reaction. This last element was the enormous efflorescence of historical and critical research in philology, archaeology, paleography, research into the actual life of the early Church and into the formation of the Scriptures in both Old and New Testament. With this research, to much of which Catholics were for long complete strangers, came the concomitant conviction that the only way to account for the differ-

¹¹ *Archives of the Paris Province of the Society of Jesus/C-13*, Labrosse to Mourier, Sept. 6, 1875.

ences between past and present was by a massive and quite natural and purely human evolution.

Such research had been going on in Germany for some years and, while some few scholars in the Church were well aware of it, its shockwaves reached a large part of the French Catholic populace, both clerical and lay, in the form of Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, published in 1863. Even then, despite the outraged cries of blasphemy, it took twelve years before the first large scale *positive* steps were taken to face up to the challenges presented by this new research. These steps were the foundation in 1875 of the several *Instituts Catholiques* or Catholic universities. By a happy accident, unforeseen and unwanted by an anti-clerical government, the restrictive laws of that government turned those institutions to serious centers of higher ecclesiastical studies rather than to the teacher training functions which had first been envisioned for them. When the first groups of Catholic scholars began to be formed in such institutions, and when seminaries barely began to open their doors to the research which had been going on, the one set of instruments at hand was the critical apparatus and the critical work which had been going on for some time now in the liberal Protestant circles of Germany. In all sincerity trying to mount a counter-research against this liberalism, Catholics often accepted, as they almost had to since there had been little serious work by their fellow Catholics so far, the very principles of this liberal research.

Besides, from the mid 1880s on, these scholars lived in an atmosphere of ferment within the Church and within France itself. With the advent of Louis Napoleon in 1848 and the consolidation of his power after 1851, most of the French church had recognized a new Charlemagne, if not a new Constantine, until he turned to new policies in the 1860s, policies which were disadvantageous to the maintenance of the pope's temporal power in Rome. In addition, in the middle of the century a most gifted generation was born in France, and it was to begin to make its presence felt toward the end of the century. It included men of literature as eminent as Proust, Peguy, Claudel, Gide, musicians such as Debussy and Ravel, painters of the rank of Matisse and Rouault, a philosopher such as Bergson, and two men involved in the Modernist crisis, Duchesne and Loisy.

By the 1880s the Catholic social movement and Christian democracy had just begun to be vocal. Then too, in the late 1890s, despite the *Ralliement* policy of Leo XIII,¹² much of the official element of the French church had most unfortunately allied itself with the anti-republican forces; never more disastrously than in the Dreyfus affair. Some of the most important ecclesiastical journals of the time were not only openly anti-Dreyfusard, but were so virulently anti-Semitic in general that to read them even now is a shaming experience for any Christian.

Theological and dogmatic controversies, no more than any other type, do not take place in a vacuum, and while an intellectual and social ambience by no means explains away the substantive issues of such a controversy, the knowledge and imaginative appreciation of such a climate of opinion and action are almost indispensable for an understanding in depth of such controversies. Here too, perhaps, there is no better way of putting oneself into this age than by reading the great novel, *Jean Barois*, by the Nobel Prize winner, Roger Martin du Gard. The hero of the novel lives, acts and suffers in and through all these years, acutely attuned to all of its facets. He goes from the typically cloistered religious schooling of youth through a crisis of faith to a Modernist acceptance of the Church and a later rejection of this and of all religious faith. By an act of even greater faith, he gives total acceptance to a scientific positivism; he is passionately involved in justice for Dreyfus and in a socialistic concern for the workers. He is an anti-clerical with a daughter in a convent, and in old age, whether in a moment of weakness or of God's grace (it is never clear), he returns to the Church.

In such an atmosphere, the ecclesiastical disciplines began a tentative revival of scholarship. Among the first of the true scholars was the Abbé Duchesne, a church historian of the very first rank. His application of rigorous methodology was a scandal to many, especially when it demolished long-held positions supposedly but-

¹² Cf. the recent study by A. Sedgwick, *The Ralliement in French Politics, 1890-1898* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964). For an example of the care and concern with which the policy was begun, cf. J. Ward, "The Algiers Toast: Lavignerie's Work or Leo XIII's," *The Catholic Historical Review*, LI, 2 (July, 1965), 173-191.

tressing the theology then taught. He held to the faith throughout his life with absolute and direct simplicity, but he did obviously enjoy his mockery of pious legends and unfounded traditions. The scandal was all the greater in the contemporary confusion of dogmatic and historical tradition in the theological manuals, and in the minds of many of the simple faithful as well as of some of the theologians. Never a Modernist, Duchesne was nevertheless strongly attacked, and later, in the reaction to Modernism, several of his great volumes were put on the Index.

A far different man was another of the scholars of the *Institut Catholique* in Paris, the Abbé Alfred Loisy who was primarily concerned with biblical studies. By 1890 he was a titular professor at the *Institut*. This was the same year as the foundation by Lagrange of the now world renowned *École Biblique de Jérusalem*, and a year after the publication of Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. The French state faculties had also at this time founded special chairs or sections for the study of religion. When Loisy began to teach from the viewpoint of modern biblical criticism, he ran into trouble. By 1893 an article by the rector of the *Institut*, Msgr. d'Hulst, "Sur la question biblique,"¹³ and another by Loisy himself on biblical studies, testified to the uneasy state of the question in the minds of many French Catholics, and they were among the occasions for Leo XIII's encyclical on Scripture, *Providentissimus Deus*.¹⁴

But from 1893 on for several years, Maurice Blondel was the main target of those worried about the purity of the faith. This was due to his work, *l'Action*, published in that year and to his *Letter on Apologetics*, published in 1896.¹⁵ These works were unsettling to many steeped in traditional thought patterns. But they did get at the heart of much of the endeavor of those later to be accused of Modernism, and also of the much larger group of

¹³ Monseigneur d'Hulst, "La question biblique," *Le Correspondant*, Paris, January 25, 1893.

¹⁴ *Litterae Encyclicae*, "Providentissimus Deus," Nov. 18, 1893, ASS, 26 (1893-1894), 278 ff. and DS 3280-3294.

¹⁵ M. Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, Texts presented and translated by A. Dru and I. Trethowan (New York, 1965).

Catholic thinkers seeking a solution to the problem of immanence and transcendence, the crux of the religious dilemma of the time.

Loisy, in a conventual solitude where he had gone as chaplain after being removed from his chair at the *Institut Catholique* in 1893, had by that time ceased to accept "the literal truth of any article of the Catholic creed," but it is too simple a solution to say that he no longer regarded himself in any sense as a Catholic. The storm clouds, long in gathering, broke in 1902 with his book, *l'Évangile et l'église*. This was supposed to be an answer to Harnack's attempt to center basic Christianity in Jesus' preaching of faith in God as Father, while emptying the preaching and Christianity itself of all dogmatic and cultural content. The reply was more radical than the original challenge, for, as Loisy said later:

I did not limit myself to criticizing Harnack; I slipped in, discreetly but really, an essential reform of biblical exegesis, of all theology, and even of Catholicism in general. . . . This work included two particularly delicate elements, at which orthodoxy could become excited: on the one hand my case against M. Harnack implied a critique of the gospel sources more radical on some points than that of the Protestant theologian; on the other hand, my defense of the Roman church against the learned professor implied at the same time the abandonment of certain absolute theses held by scholastic theology regarding the formal institution of the Church and of the sacraments by Christ, the immutability of dogmas and the nature of ecclesiastical authority.^{15a}

The controversy occasioned a second work, *Autour d'un petit livre*, in which dogmas were openly regarded as symbols alone, always varying in expression as the human mind and science changed and progressed. Both works were placed on the Index.

Meanwhile, if Loisy always protested that he was a historian, Tyrrell in England thought of himself as a philosopher of religion. Just as Loisy had been introduced to Newman's thought by Baron von Hügel, so was Tyrrell introduced to Loisy's work and to the German writers by the same man. Von Hügel was the great, enig-

^{15a} A. Loisy, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire religieuse de notre pays*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1930-1931), II, 133-134.

matic and profoundly spiritual and influential Catholic crossroads of Modernism.¹⁶

Tyrrell tried to preserve, too, the immanent and permanent vision of truth enshrined in "revelation" and in the "living idea of Christianity" by divorcing it from the outer husk, as he would say, of the mere intellectual interpretation furnished by dogma. *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, A Much Abused Letter, Through Scylla and Charybdis, Christianity at the Crossroads* were among the works in which he set forth his positions, from a pen that did not flag at all after his expulsion from the Jesuits in 1906. Loisy and Tyrrell disagreed on many a point, but they both agreed in refusing to be regarded in any way as Protestants, despite the eager attempts of some, Catholic and Protestant alike, to make them such.

Other thinkers, unshakeably within the Church, men such as Laberthonnière and Le Roy, had entered into the attempt to explain the nature of dogmatic teaching both to the Church and to the modern world with theories on the moral value of dogma or on its pragmatic nature insofar as it taught the correct attitude of man toward God. Specific refutations, explanations, counter-refutations exercised the Catholic world, especially in France, though in Italy and Germany and England too the controversy had come to involve laity and churchmen alike. In Italy, Modernism called also for a radical reform of the day-to-day workings of the Church; in Germany it was sometimes anti-Roman; in England, both Catholics and Protestants were engaged in propagating and in refuting it.

Not only books but journals, too, were weapons in the fray. *La revue de clergé française* was anti-Modernist. *Les annales de philosophie chrétienne* was Laberthonnière's journal and regularly published Blondel too. *La revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuse* was openly Modernist and was known as Loisy's paper. *Les études* was cautiously but definitely anti-Modernist, though the whole story of its stance will never be known, for a later editor destroyed its

¹⁶ The latest biographies of von Hugel are by M. de la Bedoyere, *The Life of Baron von Hugel* (London, 1951) and J. Steinmann, *Friedrich von Hugel, sa vie, son oeuvre et ses amitiés* (Paris, 1962). Cf. also, most recently, J. Heaney, S.J., "The Enigma of the Later von Hugel," *Heythrop Journal*, VI, 2 (April, 1965), 145-159.

archives relating to Modernism. In 1910 the staff of *Les études*, under de Grandmaison, founded as a specialized journal *La recherche des sciences religieuses*.

From 1903 through 1907 works of Loisy, Le Roy and Laberthonnière were put on the Index. On July 4, 1907, the decree *Lamentabili sane exitu* was issued by the Holy Office, condemning in a syllabus of sixty-five propositions "dangerous errors concerning the natural sciences, the interpretation of Holy Scripture and the principal mysteries of the faith." No authorship was indicated for these propositions, but most of them were from Loisy's works. Two months later, the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* appeared, with a coherently organized synthesis of Modernist doctrine.

The Modernists claimed, and rightly so, that they had not, singly or in concert, ever elaborated such a single system, nor had they maintained, to use the words of the encyclical, such a "synthesis of all heresies." This "synthesis" included an agnostic attitude toward rational proofs, a vital and immanent need for faith as the basis for all religious truth, a truth which was only symbolic; the origin of dogmas simply in the conscious perception of God, and the origin of sacraments in the purely human need for a tangible, concrete externalization of inner religious needs; and the denial of an objective supernatural order working itself out in history.

In contrast, the Modernists were on much less sure ground when they protested that this encyclical was a *complete* travesty of their teachings. It did summarize their scattered and disparate ideas, even if in a manner unacceptable to them but quite typical of and consonant with the systematizing mentality of the Roman theologians of the time. The actual authorship of the encyclical has been somewhat in dispute for a long time, but there are strong indications that John Baptist Lemius, O.M.I., wrote the text, and that Louis Billot, S.J., also worked on it. A publication of great interest for further research is Lemius' now hard to obtain *Le catéchisme sur le Modernisme d'après l'Encyclique* (Paris, 1907) with the text of *Pascendi* in question and answer form.

From 1907 to 1910 further disciplinary measures were taken by the Holy See, including condemnation of books and back issues of journals, the prohibition to men such as Laberthonnière to write on

theological subjects, the harassing of certain of the most eminent French and German biblical scholars. Every diocese was to have a watch committee; every seminary was to weed out suspect professors and students; every religious order was to institute a surveillance of its members. Every three months reports were to be sent to Rome. In 1910, Rome still suspected a close-knit, clandestine organization, and imposed the anti-Modernist oath which caused great commotion, especially in German university circles.

This latter Roman suspicion was basically unfounded. There was no such formal Modernist brotherhood. But it was understandable in the light of the regular appearance of pseudonymous and anonymous publications.¹⁷ The real nurturing ground of the conspiracy theory, however, was a loosely organized brotherhood, this one an anti-Modernist group, some of whose members also wrote pseudonymously and anonymously and who were securely in curial positions in Rome.

Loisy continued to write, protesting the strictures from ecclesiastical authority, arguing against the historicity of the Gospels and maintaining the legendary character of certain dogmas, until finally major excommunication was visited upon him. In 1909 he received from the French government the chair of the history of religions at the *Collège de France*, never returned to the Church, and died in 1940. Tyrrell died at the end of the main phase of the controversy, shattered in health.

The anti-Modernists are not important in themselves from a positive intellectual point of view. But negatively they were so, with their claims of a conspiracy (even of a Masonic-Jewish conspiracy), their easy delations to Rome, their positions of influence, and their delaying and side-tracking of a good amount of theological and scriptural investigation until well into the present century. With headquarters in Rome, with its chief a prelate of the Secretariat of State who also used at least a dozen pseudonyms, with a secret code for correspondence, with a journal founded in 1906 called *Corrispondenza Romana* and in 1908 *La Correspondance de Rome*,

¹⁷ E. Poulat, in his *Histoire, dogme et critique dans la crise moderniste* (Paris, 1962) has a whole "annexe" entitled "Pseudonymes et anonymes modernistes," pp. 621-647.

the anti-Modernist reaction worked through a secret organization called the *Sodalitium Pianum* or *Sapinière*. It even had the quiet support of Cardinal Merry del Val for some time. Only in 1913 was the journal suppressed, but meanwhile some of the most committed leaders of Catholicism, laity and clergy alike, had had suspicions thrown on them unjustly, some of the most respected journals had been delated, and institutions which were to help assure the continued vitality of continental Catholicism had had a shadow cast over them.

In France, integrism or so-called integral Catholicism was not a completely new phenomenon. It had existed before the Modernist crisis, and continues to exist even today in some circles. But during and after the crisis it attained an unprecedented strength and spread. In the political and social fields, integrism linked itself with the *Action Française* movement which, with a self-proclaimed atheist, Charles Maurras, at its head, enjoyed the support of much of the French church. It was in part so long respectable only because some of the most eminent of the hierarchy and some of the most eminent Catholic philosophers and theologians supported it publicly as a political and social program. Among them were de la Taille, Roland-Gosselin, Garrigou-Lagrange, who even had the *Action Française* publisher's imprint on one of his theological works, and none more so than Cardinal Billot whose resignation from the cardinalatial office took place at the time when *Action Française* was finally publicly condemned in 1926.

Meanwhile, however, the immediately theological anti-Modernist reaction was officially stopped after Pius X had died and the new pope, Benedict XVI, in the encyclical *Ad Beatissimi* in 1914, recalled that

no individual has the right to put himself forward in books, articles or speeches as being a master—a teacher—of the Church. . . . Let no one consider himself justified in describing the faith of those who hold views contrary to his own as suspect, or in accusing people of failing in discipline because they hold such views.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Litterae Encyclicae*, "Ad beatissimi," Nov. 1, 1914, *AAS*, 6 (1914), 576 ff. and *DS* 3625.

These words of the Holy Father were written just a little more than fifty years ago. When one deals with Modernist studies today, there are perhaps six areas especially in which work could be done most fruitfully. First, a serious survey history of Modernism is yet to be written for the present day. Rivière's work of 1929 is still good, but it is outdated and it suffers from being too close to the actuality of the problem. Poulat is writing a multi-volume work, the first volume of which has appeared, *Histoire, dogme et critique dans la crise moderniste*.¹⁹ In English, however, there is no full history of the movement, though one is reportedly being written at the present time.

Secondly, to proceed chronologically now, several serious studies are needed in the area of early nineteenth century philosophy and theology, especially French and German, and equally needed are studies of the institutions which helped shape the Catholic mentality of the time. As a completed instance of the first, there is the previously mentioned work of Foucher on nineteenth century French Catholic philosophy.²⁰ As an instance of the latter, recently a study has been done on a group of Catholic colleges in France from 1850 to 1880, the one nineteenth century period during which they were entirely legal.²¹ From such institutions came most future seminarians; there, from the age of ten to seventeen or eighteen, the young men's ideas of the faith and of the world were shaped; the picture of that shaping is not in every respect a happy one.

Thirdly, how Newman was read and used, and most often misread and misused, on the continent is most important. Never was there an author for whom a nuanced language was more vital; what happened to the nuances in another language and culture would be hilarious at times if it were not so serious and often tragic.

Next, the men sometimes called Modernists and on whom a shadow or at least neglect has fallen should be seriously investigated. I refer to men who were *not* truly Modernists, who never left the Church, but who were influential as crossroads or as seminal thinkers. One example, of course, was von Hugel, and in addition to the works

¹⁹ Cf. footnote 17 for complete reference.

²⁰ Cf. footnote 8 for complete reference.

²¹ J. Padberg, S.J., *The Jesuit Colleges in France between the Falloux Law and the Ferry Decrees, 1850-1880* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), Harvard University doctoral dissertation in history.

already mentioned²² a study of his notion of scriptural inspiration has in the last years been in progress. Another example, absolutely pre-eminent, would be Maurice Blondel, and one can only rejoice at the very recent publication in English for the first time of two short but very important works, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*.²³ Of course his greatest work, *l'Action*, remains to be translated, as also his last, *Les exigences philosophique du Christianisme*.

Fifthly, what did those who rose to a serious theological defense of the Church versus Modernism have to say? By that is meant men such as de la Barre and his vitalist analogy of the Church and development, or Lebreton or de Grandmaison or Gardeil or Bainvel. How did they conceive of the Church, of revelation, of dogmatic development, of tradition, of Scripture? After all, they were the men who were to influence the serious theological opinions and judgments on Modernism for at least a generation. Their understanding and evaluation of the crisis and of its various developments can be studied in an abundance of articles and books.

Finally, and this should be obvious but it remains to be said, a good number of serious studies are needed of what the Modernists themselves said, first simply from an expository point of view in general, and then from the viewpoint of a critical analysis of particularly important and neuralgic points of their teaching. Again, an example would be the now ten-year-old *Tradition et histoire dans le controverse moderniste*²⁴ or a study recently in progress on Tyrrell's concept of dogmatic development. It needs to be repeated again that despite the first impressions given by *Pascendi*, the Modernists did not all speak in unison, and only a careful disentangling of common concerns, regular disagreements and disparate solutions will let us know, as historians and theologians, what these men really thought and really said as individuals.

The great problem that lay at the heart of Modernism, the problem of Tradition

is at the same time that of the relations of Scripture to the Church, that of an eternal truth given once and for all, the

²² Cf. footnote 16 for complete reference.

²³ Cf. footnote 15 for complete reference.

²⁴ L. da Veiga Coutinho, *Tradition et histoire dans la controverse moderniste (1898-1910)* (Romae, 1954).

manifestation of which develops in time. It is the problem of a deposit which subsists in certain respects objectively in a letter and an institution divinely fixed in the fullness of time and which nevertheless only finds its truth in a subjective appropriation, indissolubly personal and communal.²⁵

It involves a theology of history and, as Kierkegaard once remarked, a theology of the Church's contemporaneity with Christ.

Blondel saw in 1907 that the present crisis, perhaps unprecedented in depth or extent—for it is simultaneously scientific, metaphysical, moral, social and political—is not a dissolution (for the spirit of faith does not die) nor even an evolution (for the spirit of faith does not change); it is a *purification* of the religious sense and an *integration* of Catholic truth . . . to a religion of supernatural authority, but also of inward freedom.²⁶

This paper has attempted to present, however briefly, some of the aspects of that world in which the crisis came into being. Modernism broke into the hothouse atmosphere of nineteenth century Catholicism. It was a disruptive and dangerous and harmful storm, no doubt, but despite the efforts of some to patch up the hothouse and cover over the panes with whitewash again and to keep a delicately nurtured faith inside, despite this, the Church did come forth into an unsheltered but real world where the atmosphere could be perilous but bracing too, an atmosphere conducive finally to what we see going on in the Church now: mature unforced, healthy growth.

Modernism was a hasty, premature, ill-founded, often wrong and sometimes tragic attempt at a renaissance of Catholic life and thought. But Jacob Burckhardt in his *Reflections on History* once remarked that one of the marks of higher cultures was precisely their capacity for renaissances. We are in the midst of a great one in the Church now.

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²⁵ R. Marlé, S.J., *Au coeur de la crise moderniste* (Paris, 1960), 351.

²⁶ M. Blondel, from *Mercure de France* for 1907, quoted in Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, Introduction, 32-33.