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# **Winds of Doctrine**

## **Studies in Contemporary Opinion**

**By: George Santayana**

**Edited by: David E Spiech, Martin A. Coleman,  
Faedra Lazar Weiss**

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## II

### MODERNISM AND CHRISTIANITY

PREVALENT winds of doctrine must needs penetrate at last into the cloister. Social instability and moral confusion, reconstructions of history and efforts after reform, are things characteristic of the present age; and under the name of modernism they have made their appearance even in that institution which is constitutionally the most stable, of most explicit mind, least inclined to revise its collective memory or established usages—I mean the Catholic church. Even after this church was constituted by the fusion of many influences and by the gradual exclusion of those heresies—some of them older than explicit orthodoxy—which seemed to misrepresent its implications or spirit, there still remained an inevitable propensity among Catholics to share the moods of their respective ages and countries, and to reconcile them if possible with their professed faith. Often these cross influences were so strong that the profession of faith was changed frankly to suit them, and Catholicism was openly abandoned; but even where this did not occur we may detect in the Catholic minds of each age some strange conjunctions and compromises with the *Zeitgeist*. Thus the morality of chivalry and war, the ideals of foppishness and honour, have been long maintained side by side with the maxims of the gospel, which they entirely contradict. Later the system of Copernicus, incompatible at heart with the anthropocentric and moralistic view of the world which Christianity implies, was accepted by the church with some lame attempt to render it innocuous; but it remains an alien and hostile element, like a spent bullet lodged in the flesh. In more recent times we have heard of liberal Catholicism, the attitude assumed by some generous but divided minds, too much attached to their traditional religion to abandon it, but too weak and too hopeful not to glow also with enthusiasm for modern liberty and progress. Had those

minds been, I will not say intelligently Catholic but radically Christian, they would have felt that this liberty was simply liberty to be damned, and this progress not an advance towards the true good of man, but a lapse into endless and heathen wanderings. For Christianity, in its essence and origin, was an urgent summons to repent and come out of just such a worldly life as modern liberty and progress hold up as an ideal to the nations. In the Roman empire, as in the promised land of liberalism, each man sought to get and to enjoy as much as he could, and supported a ponderous government neutral as to religion and moral traditions, but favourable to the accumulation of riches; so that a certain enlightenment and cosmopolitanism were made possible, and private passions and tastes could be gratified without encountering persecution or public obloquy, though not without a general relaxation of society and a vulgarising of arts and manners. That something so self-indulgent and worldly as this ideal of liberalism could have been thought compatible with Christianity, the first initiation into which, in baptism, involves renouncing the world, might well astonish us, had we not been rendered deaf to moral discords by the very din which from our birth they have been making in our ears.

But this is not all. Primitive Christianity was not only a summons to turn one's heart and mind away from a corrupt world; it was a summons to do so under pain of instant and terrible punishment. It was the conviction of pious Jews since the days of the Prophets that mercilessness, avarice, and disobedience to revealed law were the direct path to ruin; a world so wicked as the liberal world against which St. John the Baptist thundered was necessarily on the verge of destruction. Sin, although we moderns may not think so, seemed to the ancient Jews a fearful imprudence. The hand of the Lord would descend on it heavily, and very soon. The whole Roman civilisation was to be overthrown in the twinkling of an eye. Those who hoped to be of the remnant and to be saved, so as to lead a clarified and heavenly life in the New Jerusalem, must hasten to put on sackcloth and ashes, to fast and to pray, to watch with girded loins for the coming of the kingdom; it was superfluous for them to study the dead past or to take thought for the morrow. The cataclysm was at hand; a new heaven and a new earth—far more worthy of study—would be unrolled before that very generation.

There was indeed something terribly levelling, revolutionary, serious, and expectant about that primitive gospel; and in so far as liberal-

ism possessed similar qualities, in so far as it was moved by indignation, pity, and fervent hope, it could well preach on early Christian texts. But the liberal Catholics were liberals of the polite and governmental sort; they were shocked at suffering rather than at sin, and they feared not the Lord but the movement of public opinion. Some of them were vaguely pious men, whose conservatism in social and moral matters forbade them to acquiesce in the disappearance of the church altogether, and they thought it might be preserved, as the English church is, by making opportune concessions. Others were simply aristocrats, desirous that the pacifying influence of religion should remain strong over the masses. The clergy was not, in any considerable measure, tossed by these opposing currents; the few priests who were liberals were themselves men of the world, patriots, and orators. Such persons could not look forward to a fierce sifting of the wheat from the tares, or to any burning of whole bundles of nations, for they were nothing if not romantic nationalists, and the idea of faggots of any sort was most painful to their minds. They longed rather for a sweet cohabitation with everybody, and a mild tolerance of almost everything. A war for religion seemed to them a crime, but a war for nationality glorious and holy. No wonder that their work in nation-building has endured, while their sentiments in religion are scattered to the winds. The liberalism for the sake of which they were willing to eviscerate their Christianity has already lost its vitality; it survives as a pale parliamentary tradition, impotent before the tide of socialism rising behind its back. The Catholicism which they wished to see gently lingering is being driven out of national life by official spoliations and popular mockeries. It is fast becoming what it was in the beginning, a sect with more or less power to alienate the few who genuinely adhere to it from the pagan society in which they are forced to live.

The question what is true or essential Christianity is a thorny one, because each party gives the name of genuine Christianity to what it happens to believe. Thus Professor Harnack, not to mention less distinguished historians, makes the original essence of Christianity coincide – what a miracle! – with his own Lutheran and Kantian sentiments. But the essence of Christianity, as of everything else, is the whole of it; and the genuine nature of a seed is at least as well expressed by what it becomes in contact with the earth and air as by what it seems in its primitive minuteness. It is quite true, as the modernists tell us, that in the beginning Christian faith was not a matter of scholastic definitions,

nor even of intellectual dogmas. Religions seldom begin in that form, and paganism was even less intellectual and less dogmatic than early Christianity. The most primitive Christian faith consisted in a conversion of the whole man—intellect, habits, and affections—from the life of the world to a new mystical life, in answer to a moral summons and a prophecy about destiny. The moral summons was to renounce home, kindred, possessions, the respect of men, the hypocrisies of the synagogue, and to devote oneself to a wandering and begging life, healing, praying, and preaching. And preaching what? Preaching the prophecy about destiny which justified that conversion and renunciation; preaching that the world, in its present constitution, was about to be destroyed on account of its wickedness, and that the ignorant, the poor, and the down-trodden, if they trusted this prophecy, and turned their backs at once on all the world pursues, would be saved in the new deluge, and would form a new society, of a more or less supernatural kind, to be raised on the ruins of all present institutions. The poor were called, but the rich were called also, and perhaps even the heathen; for there was in all men, even in all nature (this is the one touch of speculative feeling in the gospel), a precious potentiality of goodness. All were essentially amiable, though accidentally wretched and depraved; and by the magic of a new faith and hope this soul of goodness in all living things might be freed from the hideous incubus of circumstance that now oppresses it, and might come to bloom openly as the penetrating eye of the lover, even now, sees that it could bloom. Love, then, and sympathy, particularly towards the sinful and diseased, a love relieved of sentimentality by the deliberate practice of healing, warning, and comforting; a complete aversion from all the interests of political society, and a confident expectation of a cataclysm that should suddenly transfigure the world—such was Christian religion in its origin. The primitive Christian was filled with the sense of a special election and responsibility, and of a special hope. He was serene, abstracted, incorruptible, his inward eye fixed on a wonderful revelation. He was as incapable of attacking as of serving the state; he despised or ignored everything for which the state exists, labour, wealth, power, felicity, splendour, and learning. With Christ the natural man in him had been crucified, and in Christ he had risen again a spiritual man, to walk the earth, as a messenger from heaven, for a few more years. His whole life was an experience of perpetual graces and miracles.

The prophecy about the speedy end of this wicked world was not fulfilled as the early Christians expected; but this fact is less disconcerting to the Christian than one would suppose. The spontaneous or instinctive Christian—and there is such a type of mind, quite apart from any affiliation to historic Christianity—takes a personal and dramatic view of the world; its values and even its reality are the values and reality which it may have for him. It would profit him nothing to win it, if he lost his own soul. That prophecy about the destruction of nature springs from this attitude; nature must be subservient to the human conscience; it must satisfy the hopes of the prophet and vindicate the saints. That the years should pass and nothing should seem to happen need not shatter the force of this prophecy for those whose imagination it excites. This world must actually vanish very soon for each of us; and this is the point of view that counts with the Christian mind. Even if we consider posterity, the kingdoms and arts and philosophies of this world are short lived; they shift their aims continually and shift their substance. The prophecy of their destruction is therefore being fulfilled continually; the need of repentance, if one would be saved, is truly urgent; and the means of that salvation cannot be an operation upon this world, but faith in another world that, in the experience of each soul, is to follow upon it. Thus the summons to repent and the prophecy about destiny which were the root of Christianity, can fully retain their spirit when for “this wicked world” we read “this transitory life” and for “the coming of the Kingdom” we read “life everlasting.” The change is important, but it affects the application rather than the nature of the gospel. Morally there is a loss, because men will never take so hotly what concerns another life as what affects this one; speculatively, on the other hand, there is a gain, for the expectation of total transformations and millenniums on earth is a very crude illusion, while the relation of the soul to nature is an open question in philosophy, and there will always be a great loftiness and poetic sincerity in the feeling that the soul is a stranger in this world and has other destinies in store.

What would make the preaching of the gospel utterly impossible would be the admission that it had no authority to proclaim what has happened or what is going to happen, either in this world or in another. A prophecy about destiny is an account, however vague, of events to be actually experienced, and of their causes. The whole inspiration of Hebraic religion lies in that. It was not metaphorically

that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. The promised land was a piece of earth. The kingdom was an historical fact. It was not symbolically that Israel was led into captivity, or that it returned and restored the Temple. It was not ideally that a Messiah was to come. Memory of such events is in the same field as history; prophecy is in the same field as natural science. Natural science too is an account of what will happen, and under what conditions. It too is a prophecy about destiny. Accordingly, while it is quite true that speculations about nature and history are not contained explicitly in the religion of the gospel, yet the message of this religion is one which speculations about nature and reconstructions of history may extend congruously, or may contradict and totally annul. If physical science should remove those threats of destruction to follow upon sin which Christian prophecy contains, or if it should prove that what brings destruction is just that unworldly, prayerful, all-forgiving, idle, and revolutionary attitude which the gospel enjoins, then physical science would be incompatible with Christianity; not with this or that text of the Bible merely, about the sun standing still or the dead rising again, but with the whole foundation of what Christ himself, with John the Baptist, St. Paul, St. James, and St. John, preached to the world.

Even the pagan poets, when they devised a myth, half believed in it for a fact. What really lent some truth—moral truth only—to their imaginations was indeed the beauty of nature, the comedy of life, or the groans of mankind, crushed between the upper and the nether millstones; but being scientifically ignorant they allowed their pictorial wisdom to pass for a revealed science, for a physics of the unseen. If even among the pagans the poetic expression of human experience could be mistaken in this way for knowledge of occult existences, how much more must this have been the case among a more ignorant and a more intense nation like the Jews? Indeed, *events* are what the Jews have always remembered and hoped for; if their religion was not a guide to events, an assured means towards a positive and experimental salvation, it was nothing. Their theology was meagre in the description of the Lord's nature, but rich in the description of his ways. Indeed, their belief in the existence and power of the Lord, if we take it pragmatically and not imaginatively, was simply the belief in certain moral harmonies in destiny, in the sufficiency of conduct of a certain sort to secure success and good fortune, both national and personal. This faith was partly an experience and partly a demand; it turned on

history and prophecy. History was interpreted by a prophetic insight into the moral principle, believed to govern it; and prophecy was a passionate demonstration of the same principles, at work in the catastrophes of the day or of the morrow.

There is no doubt a Platonic sort of religion, a worship of the ideal apart from its power to realise itself, which has entered largely into the life of Christians; and the more mystical and disinterested they were, the more it has tended to take the place of Hebraism. But the Platonists, too, when left to their instincts, follow their master in attributing power and existence, by a sort of cumulative worship and imaginative hyperbole, to what in the first place they worship because it is good. To divorce, then, as the modernists do, the history of the world from the story of salvation, and God's government and the sanctions of religion from the operation of matter, is a *fundamental apostasy* from Christianity. Christianity, being a practical and living faith in a possible eventual redemption from sin, from the punishment for sin, from the thousand circumstances that make the most brilliant worldly life a sham and a failure, essentially involves a faith in a supernatural physics, in such an economy of forces, behind, within, and around the discoverable forces of nature, that the destiny which nature seems to prepare for us may be reversed, that failures may be turned into successes, ignominy into glory, and humble faith into triumphant vision: and this not merely by a change in our point of view or estimation of things, but by an actual historical, physical transformation in the things themselves. To believe this in our day may require courage, even a certain childish simplicity; but were not courage and a certain childish simplicity always requisite for Christian faith? It never was a religion for the rationalist and the worldling; it was based on alienation from the world, from the intellectual world no less than from the economic and political. It flourished in the Oriental imagination that is able to treat all existence with disdain and to hold it superbly at arm's length, and at the same time is subject to visions and false memories, is swayed by the eloquence of private passion, and raises confidently to heaven the cry of the poor, the bereaved, and the distressed. Its daily bread, from the beginning, was hope for a miraculous change of scene, for prison-walls falling to the ground about it, for a heart inwardly comforted, and a shower of good things from the sky.

It is clear that a supernaturalistic faith of this sort, which might wholly inspire some revolutionary sect, can never wholly inspire



human society. Whenever a nation is converted to Christianity, its Christianity, in practice, must be largely converted into paganism. The true Christian is in all countries a pilgrim and a stranger; not his kinsmen, but whoever does the will of his Father who is in heaven is his brother and sister and mother and his real compatriot. In a nation that calls itself Christian every child may be pledged, at baptism, to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil; but the flesh will assert itself notwithstanding, the devil will have his due, and the nominal Christian, become a man of business and the head of a family, will form an integral part of that very world which he will pledge his children to renounce in turn as he holds them over the font. The lips, even the intellect, may continue to profess the Christian ideal; but public and social life will be guided by quite another. The ages of faith, the ages of Christian unity, were such only superficially. When all men are Christians only a small element can be Christian in the average man. The thirteenth century, for instance, is supposed to be the golden age of Catholicism; but what seems to have filled it, if we may judge by the witness of Dante? Little but bitter conflicts, racial and religious; faithless rebellions, both in states and in individuals, against the Christian regimen; worldliness in the church, barbarism in the people, and a dawning of all sorts of scientific and æsthetic passions, in themselves quite pagan and contrary to the spirit of the gospel. Christendom at that time was by no means a kingdom of God on earth; it was a conglomeration of incorrigible rascals, intellectually more or less Christian. We may see the same thing under different circumstances in the Spain of Philip II. Here was a government consciously labouring in the service of the church, to resist Turks, convert pagans, banish Moslems, and crush Protestants. Yet the very forces engaged in defending the church, the army and the Inquisition, were alien to the Christian life; they were fit embodiments rather of chivalry and greed, or of policy and jealous dominion. The ecclesiastical forces also, theology, ritual, and hierarchy, employed in spreading the gospel were themselves alien to the gospel. An anti-worldly religion finds itself in fact in this dilemma: if it remains merely spiritual, developing no material organs, it cannot affect the world; while if it develops organs with which to operate on the world, these organs become a part of the world from which it is trying to wean the individual spirit, so that the moment it is armed for conflict such a religion has two enemies on its hands. It is stifled by its necessary armour, and adds treason in its

members to hostility in its foes. The passions and arts it uses against its opponents are as fatal to itself as those which its opponents array against it.

In every age in which a supernaturalistic system is preached we must accordingly expect to find the world standing up stubbornly against it, essentially unconverted and hostile, whatever name it may have been christened with; and we may expect the spirit of the world to find expression, not only in overt opposition to the supernaturalistic system, but also in the surviving or supervening worldliness of the faithful. Such an insidious revulsion of the natural man against a religion he does not openly discard is what, in modern Christendom, we call the Renaissance. No less than the Revolution (which is the later open rebellion against the same traditions) the Renaissance is radically inimical to Christianity. To say that Christianity survives, even if weakened or disestablished, is to say that the Renaissance and the Revolution are still incomplete. Far from being past events they are living programmes. The ideal of the Renaissance is to restore pagan standards in polite learning, in philosophy, in sentiment, and in morals. It is to abandon and exactly reverse one's baptismal vows. Instead of forsaking this wicked world, the men of the Renaissance accept, love, and cultivate the world, with all its pomp and vanities; they believe in the blamelessness of natural life and in its perfectibility; or they cling at least to a noble ambition to perfect it and a glorious ability to enjoy it. Instead of renouncing the flesh, they feed, refine, and adorn it; their arts glorify its beauty and its passions. And far from renouncing the devil—if we understand by the devil the proud assertion on the part of the finite of its autonomy, autonomy of the intellect in science, autonomy of the heart and will in morals—the men of the Renaissance are possessed by the devil altogether. They worship nothing and acknowledge authority in nothing save in their own spirit. No opposition could be more radical and complete than that between the Renaissance and the anti-worldly religion of the gospel.

"I see a vision," Nietzsche says somewhere, "so full of meaning, yet so wonderfully strange—Cæsar Borgia become pope! Do you understand? Ah, that would verily have been the triumph for which I am longing to-day. Then Christianity would have been done for." And Nietzsche goes on to accuse Luther of having spoiled this lovely possibility, which was about to be realised, by frightening the papacy out of its mellow paganism into something like a restoration of the old

acrid Christianity. A dream of this sort, even if less melodramatic than Nietzsche's, has visited the mind of many a neo-Catholic or neopagan. If the humanistic tendencies of the Renaissance could have worked on unimpeded, might not a revolution from above, a gradual rationalisation, have transformed the church? Its dogma might have been insensibly understood to be nothing but myth, its miracles nothing but legend, its sacraments mere symbols, its Bible pure literature, its liturgy just poetry, its hierarchy an administrative convenience, its ethics an historical accident, and its whole function simply to lend a warm mystical aureole to human culture and ignorance. The Reformation prevented this euthanasia of Christianity. It re-expressed the unenlightened absolutism of the old religion; it insisted that dogma was scientifically true, that salvation was urgent and fearfully doubtful, that the world, and the worldly paganised church, were as Sodom and Gomorrah, and that sin, though natural to man, was to God an abomination. In fighting this movement, which soon became heretical, the Catholic church had to fight it with its own weapons, and thereby reawakened in its own bosom the same sinister convictions. It did not have to dig deep to find them. Even without Luther, convinced Catholics would have appeared in plenty to prevent Cæsar Borgia, had he secured the tiara, from being pope in any novel fashion or with any revolutionary result. The supernaturalism, the literal realism, the other-worldliness of the Catholic church are too much the soul of it to depart without causing its dissolution. While the church lives at all, it must live on the strength which these principles can lend it. And they are not altogether weak. Persons who feel themselves to be exiles in this world—and what noble mind, from Empedocles down, has not had that feeling?—are mightily inclined to believe themselves citizens of another. There will always be spontaneous, instinctive Christians; and when, under the oppression of sin, salvation is looked for and miracles are expected, the supernatural scheme of salvation which historical Christianity offers will not always be despised. The modernists think the church is doomed if it turns a deaf ear to the higher criticism or ignores the philosophy of M. Bergson. But it has outlived greater storms. A moment when any exotic superstition can find excitable minds to welcome it, when new and grotesque forms of faith can spread among the people, when the ultimate impotence of science is the theme of every cheap philosopher, when constructive philology is reefing its sails, when the judicious grieve at the portentous metaphysi-

cal shams of yesterday and smile at those of to-day—such a moment is rather ill chosen for prophesying the extinction of a deep-rooted system of religion because your own studies make it seem to you incredible; especially if you hold a theory of knowledge that regards all opinions as arbitrary postulates, which it may become convenient to abandon at any moment.

Modernism is the infiltration into minds that begin by being Catholic and wish to remain so of two contemporary influences: one the rationalistic study of the Bible and of church history, the other modern philosophy, especially in its mystical and idealistic forms. The sensitiveness of the modernists to these two influences is creditable to them as men, however perturbing it may be to them as Catholics; for what makes them adopt the views of rationalistic historians is simply the fact that those views seem, in substance, convincingly true; and what makes them wander into transcendental speculations is the warmth of their souls, needing to express their faith anew, and to follow their inmost inspiration, wherever it may lead them. A scrupulous honesty in admitting the probable facts of history, and a fresh upwelling of mystical experience, these are the motives, creditable to any spiritual man, that have made modernists of so many. But these excellent things appear in the modernists under rather unfortunate circumstances. For the modernists to begin with are Catholics, and usually priests; they are pledged to a fixed creed, touching matters both of history and of philosophy; and it would be a marvel if rationalistic criticism of the Bible and rationalistic church history confirmed that creed on its historical side, or if irresponsible personal speculations, in the manner of Ritschl or of M. Bergson, confirmed its metaphysics.

I am far from wishing to suggest that an orthodox Christian cannot be scrupulously honest in admitting the probable facts, or cannot have a fresh spiritual experience, or frame an original philosophy. But what we think probable hangs on our standard of probability and of evidence; the spiritual experiences that come to us are according to our disposition and affections; and any new philosophy we frame will be an answer to the particular problems that beset us, and an expression of the solutions we hope for. Now this standard of probability, this disposition, and these problems and hopes may be those of a Christian or they may not. The true Christian, for instance, will begin by regarding miracles as probable; he will either believe he has experienced them in his own person, or hope for them earnestly; nothing will seem

to him more natural, more in consonance with the actual texture of life, than that they should have occurred abundantly and continuously in the past. When he finds the record of one he will not inquire, like the rationalist, how that false record could have been concocted; but rather he will ask how the rationalist, in spite of so many witnesses to the contrary, has acquired his fixed assurance of the universality of the commonplace. An answer perhaps could be offered of which the rationalist need not be ashamed. We might say that faith in the universality of the commonplace (in its origin, no doubt, simply an imaginative presumption) is justified by our systematic mastery of matter in the arts. The rejection of miracles *a priori* expresses a conviction that the laws by which we can always control or predict the movement of matter govern that movement universally; and evidently, if the material course of history is fixed mechanically, the mental and moral course of it is thereby fixed on the same plan; for a mind not expressed somehow in matter cannot be revealed to the historian. This may be good philosophy, but we could not think so if we were good Christians. We should then expect to move matter by prayer. Rationalistic history and criticism are therefore based, as Pius X. most accurately observed in his Encyclical on modernism, on rationalistic philosophy; and we might add that rationalistic philosophy is based on practical art, and that practical art, by which we help ourselves, like Prometheus, and make instruments of what religion worships, when this art is carried beyond the narrowest bounds, is the essence of pride and irreligion. Miners, machinists, and artisans are irreligious by trade. Religion is the love of life in the consciousness of impotence.

Similarly, the spontaneous insight of Christians and their new philosophies will express a Christian disposition. The chief problems in them will be sin and redemption; the conclusion will be some fresh intuition of divine love and heavenly beatitude. It would be no sign of originality in a Christian to begin discoursing on love like Ovid or on heaven like Mohammed, or stop discoursing on them at all; it would be a sign of apostasy.

Now the modernists' criterion of probability in history or of worthiness in philosophy is not the Christian criterion. It is that of their contemporaries outside the church, who are rationalists in history and egotists or voluntarists in philosophy. The biblical criticism and mystical speculations of the modernists call for no special remark; they are such as any studious or spiritual person, with no inherited religion,

might compose in our day. But what is remarkable and well-nigh incredible is that even for a moment they should have supposed this non-Christian criterion in history and this non-Christian direction in metaphysics compatible with adherence to the Catholic church. That seems to presuppose, in men who in fact are particularly thoughtful and learned, an inexplicable ignorance of history, of theology, and of the world.

Everything, however, has its explanation. In a Catholic seminary, as the modernists bitterly complain, very little is heard of the views held in the learned world outside. It is not taught there that the Christian religion is only one of many, some of them older and superior to it in certain respects; that it itself is eclectic and contains inward contradictions; that it is and always has been divided into rancorous sects; that its position in the world is precarious and its future hopeless. On the contrary, everything is so presented as to persuade the innocent student that all that is good or true anywhere is founded on the faith he is preparing to preach, that the historical evidences of its truth are irrefragable, that it is logically perfect and spiritually all-sufficing. These convictions, which no breath from the outside is allowed to ruffle, are deepened in the case of pensive and studious minds, like those of the leading modernists, by their own religious experience. They understand in what they are taught more, perhaps, than their teachers intend. They understand how those ideas originated, they can trace a similar revelation in their own lives. This (which a cynic might expect would be the beginning of disillusion) only deepens their religious faith and gives it a wider basis; report and experience seem to conspire. But trouble is brewing here; for a report that can be confirmed by experience can also be enlarged by it, and it is easy to see in traditional revelation itself many diverse sources; different temperaments and different types of thought have left their impress upon it. Yet other temperaments and other types of thought might continue the task. Revelation seems to be progressive; a part may fall to us also to furnish.

This insight, for a Christian, has its dangers. No doubt it gives him a key to the understanding and therefore, in one sense, to the acceptance of many a dogma. Christian dogmas were not pieces of wanton information fallen from heaven; they were imaginative views, expressing now some primordial instinct in all men, now the national hopes and struggles of Israel, now the moral or dialectical philosophy of the

later Jews and Greeks. Such a derivation does not, of itself, render these dogmas necessarily mythical. They might be ideal expressions of human experience and yet be literally true as well, provided we assume (what is assumed throughout in Christianity) that the world is made for man, and that even God is just such a God as man would have wished him to be, the existent ideal of human nature and the foregone solution to all human problems. Nevertheless, Christian dogmas are definite,<sup>1</sup> while human inspirations are potentially limitless; and if the object of the two is identical either the dogmas must be stretched and ultimately abandoned, or inspiration which does not conform to them must be denounced as illusory or diabolical.

At this point the modernist first chooses the path which must lead him away, steadily and for ever, from the church which he did not think to desert. He chooses a personal, psychological, variable standard of inspiration; he becomes, in principle, a Protestant. Why does he not become one in name also? Because, as one of the most distinguished modernists has said, the age of partial heresy is past. It is suicidal to make one part of an organic system the instrument for attacking another part; and it is also comic. What you appeal to and stand firmly rooted in is no more credible, no more authoritative, than what you challenge in its name. In vain will you pit the church against the pope; at once you will have to pit the Bible against the church, and then the New Testament against the Old, or the genuine Jesus against the New Testament, or God revealed in nature against God revealed in the Bible, or God revealed in your own conscience or transcendental self against God revealed in nature; and you will be lucky if your conscience and transcendental self can long hold their own against the flux of immediate experience. Religion, the modernists feel, must be taken broadly and sympathetically, as a great human historical symbol for the truth. At least in Christianity you should aspire to embrace and express the whole; to seize it in its deep inward sources and follow it on all sides in its vital development. But if the

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<sup>1</sup> At least in their devotional and moral import. I suggest this qualification in deference to M. Le Roy's interesting theory of dogma, viz., that the verbal or intellectual definition of a dogma may be changed without changing the dogma itself (as a sentence might be translated into a new language without altering the meaning) provided the suggested conduct and feeling in the presence of the mystery remained the same. Thus the definition of transubstantiation might be modified to suit an idealistic philosophy, but the new definition would be no less orthodox than the old if it did not discourage the worship of the consecrated elements or the sense of mystical union with Christ in the sacrament.



age of partial heresy is past, has not the age of total heresy succeeded? What is this whole phenomenon of religion but human experience interpreted by human imagination? And what is the modernist, who would embrace it all, but a freethinker, with a sympathetic interest in religious illusions? Of course, that is just what he is; but it takes him a strangely long time to discover it. He fondly supposes (such is the prejudice imbibed by him in the cradle and in the seminary) that all human inspirations are necessarily similar and concurrent, that by trusting an inward light he cannot be led away from his particular religion, but on the contrary can only find confirmation for it, together with fresh spiritual energies. He has been reared in profound ignorance of other religions, which were presented to him, if at all, only in grotesque caricature; or if anything good had to be admitted in them, it was set down to a premonition of his own system or a derivation from it—a curious conceit, which seems somehow not to have wholly disappeared from the minds of Protestants, or even of professors of philosophy. I need not observe how completely the secret of each alien religion is thereby missed and its native accent outraged: the most serious consequence, for the modernist, of this unconsciousness of whatever is not Christian is an unconsciousness of what, in contrast to other religions, Christianity itself is. He feels himself full of love—except for the pope—of mysticism, and of a sort of archaeological piety. He is learned and eloquent and wistful. Why should he not remain in the church? Why should he not bring all its cold and recalcitrant members up to his own level of insight?

The modernist, like the Protestants before him, is certainly justified in contrasting a certain essence or true life of religion with the formulas and practices, not all equally well-chosen, which have crystallised round it. In the routine of Catholic teaching and worship there is notoriously a deal of mummery: phrases and ceremonies abound that have lost their meaning, and that people run through without even that general devout attitude and unction which, after all, is all that can be asked for in the presence of mysteries. Not only is all sense of the historical or moral basis of dogma wanting, but the dogma itself is hardly conceived explicitly; all is despatched with a stock phrase, or a quotation from some theological compendium. Ecclesiastical authority acts as if it felt that more profundity would be confusing and that more play of mind might be dangerous. This is that “Scholasticism” and “Mediaevalism” against which the modernists inveigh or under



which they groan; and to this intellectual barrenness may be added the offences against taste, verisimilitude, and justice which their more critical minds may discern in many an act and pronouncement of their official superiors. Thus both their sense for historical truth and their spontaneous mysticism drive the modernists to contrast with the official religion what was pure and vital in the religion of their fathers. Like the early Protestants, they wish to revert to a more genuine Christianity; but while their historical imagination is much more accurate and well-fed than that of any one in the sixteenth century could be, they have no hold on the Protestant principle of faith. The Protestants, taking the Bible as an oracle which personal inspiration was to interpret, could reform tradition in any way and to any extent which their reason or feeling happened to prompt. But so long as their Christianity was a positive faith, the residue, when all the dross had been criticised and burned away, was of divine authority. The Bible never became for them merely an ancient Jewish encyclopædia, often eloquent, often curious, and often barbarous. God never became a literary symbol, covering some problematical cosmic force, or some ideal of the conscience. But for the modernist this total transformation takes place at once. He keeps the whole Catholic system, but he believes in no part of it as it demands to be believed. He understands and shares the moral experience that it enshrines; but the bubble has been pricked, the painted world has been discovered to be but painted. He has ceased to be a Christian to become an amateur, or if you will a connoisseur, of Christianity. He believes—and this unquestioningly, for he is a child of his age—in history, in philology, in evolution, perhaps in German idealism; he does not believe in sin, nor in salvation, nor in revelation. His study of history has disclosed Christianity to him in its evolution and in its character of a myth; he wishes to keep it in its entirety precisely because he regards it as a convention, like a language or a school of art; whereas the Protestants wished, on the contrary, to reduce it to its original substance, because they fondly supposed that that original substance was so much literal truth. Modernism is accordingly an ambiguous and unstable thing. It is the love of all Christianity in those who perceive that it is all a fable. It is the historic attachment to his church of a Catholic who has discovered that he is a pagan.

When the modernists are pressed to explain their apparently double allegiance, they end by saying that what historical and philological

criticism conjectures to be the facts must be accepted as such; while the Christian dogmas touching these things—the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, for instance—must be taken in a purely symbolic or moral sense. In saying this they may be entirely right; it seems to many of us that Christianity is indeed a fable, yet full of meaning if you take it as such; for what scraps of historical truth there may be in the Bible or of metaphysical truth in theology are of little importance; whilst the true greatness and beauty of this, as of all religions, is to be found in its *moral idealism*, I mean, in the expression it gives, under cover of legends, prophecies, or mysteries, of the effort, the tragedy, and the consolations of human life. Such a moral fable is what Christianity is in fact; but it is far from what it is in intention. The modernist view, the view of a sympathetic rationalism, revokes the whole Jewish tradition on which Christianity is grafted; it takes the seriousness out of religion; it sweetens the pang of sin, which becomes misfortune; it removes the urgency of salvation; it steals empirical reality away from the last judgment, from hell, and from heaven; it steals historical reality away from the Christ of religious tradition and personal devotion. The moral summons and the prophecy about destiny which were the soul of the gospel have lost all force for it and become fables.

The modernist, then, starts with the orthodox but untenable persuasion that Catholicism comprehends all that is good; he adds the heterodox though amiable sentiment that any well-meaning ambition of the mind, any hope, any illumination, any science, must be good, and therefore compatible with Catholicism. He bathes himself in idealistic philosophy, he dabbles in liberal politics, he accepts and emulates rationalistic exegesis and anti-clerical church history. Soon he finds himself, on every particular point, out of sympathy with the acts and tendencies of the church to which he belongs; and then he yields to the most pathetic of his many illusions—he sets about to purge this church, so as not to be compelled to abandon it; to purge it of its first principles, of its whole history, and of its sublime if chimerical ideal.

The modernist wishes to reconcile the church and the world. Therein he forgets what Christianity came into the world to announce and why its message was believed. It came to announce salvation from the world; there should be no more need of just those things which the modernist so deeply loves and respects and blushes that his church should not be adorned with—emancipated science, free poetic

religion, optimistic politics, and dissolute art. These things, according to the Christian conscience, were all vanity and vexation of spirit, and the pagan world itself almost confessed as much. They were vexatious and vain because they were bred out of sin, out of ignoring the inward and the revealed law of God; and they would lead surely and quickly to destruction. The needful salvation from these follies, Christianity went on to announce, had come through the cross of Christ; whose grace, together with admission to his future heavenly kingdom, was offered freely to such as believed in him, separated themselves from the world, and lived in charity, humility, and innocence, waiting lamp in hand for the celestial bridegroom. These abstracted and elected spirits were the true disciples of Christ and the church itself.

Having no ears for this essential message of Christianity, the modernist also has no eyes for its history. The church converted the world only partially and inessentially; yet Christianity was outwardly established as the traditional religion of many nations. And why? Because, although the prophecies it relied on were strained and its miracles dubious, it furnished a needful sanctuary from the shames, sorrows, injustices, violence, and gathering darkness of earth; and not only a sanctuary one might fly to, but a holy precinct where one might live, where there was sacred learning, based on revelation and tradition, to occupy the inquisitive, and sacred philosophy to occupy the speculative; where there might be religious art, ministering to the faith, and a new life in the family or in the cloister, transformed by a permeating spirit of charity, sacrifice, soberness, and prayer. These principles by their very nature could not become those of the world, but they could remain in it as a leaven and an ideal. As such they remain to this day, and very efficaciously, in the Catholic church. The modernists talk a great deal of development, and they do not see that what they detest in the church is a perfect development of its original essence; that monachism, scholasticism, Jesuitism, ultramontaniam, and Vaticanism are all thoroughly apostolic; beneath the overtones imposed by a series of ages they give out the full and exact note of the New Testament. Much has been added, but nothing has been lost. Development (though those who talk most of it seem to forget it) is not the same as flux and dissolution. It is not a continuity through changes of any sort, but the evolution of something latent and preformed, or else the creation of new instruments of defence for the same original life. In this sense there was an immense development of Christianity

during the first three centuries, and this development has continued, more slowly, ever since, but only in the Roman church; for the Eastern churches have refused themselves all new expressions, while the Protestant churches have eaten more and more into the core. It is a striking proof of the preservative power of readjustment that the Roman church, in the midst of so many external transformations as it has undergone, still demands the same kind of faith that John the Baptist demanded, I mean faith in another world. The *mise-en-scène* has changed immensely. The gospel has been encased in theology, in ritual, in ecclesiastical authority, in conventional forms of charity, like some small bone of a saint in a gilded reliquary; but the relic for once is genuine, and the gospel has been preserved by those thick incrustations. Many an isolated fanatic or evangelical missionary in the slums shows a greater resemblance to the apostles in his outer situation than the pope does; but what mind-healer or revivalist nowadays preaches the doom of the natural world and its vanity, or the reversal of animal values, or the blessedness of poverty and chastity, or the inferiority of natural human bonds, or a contempt for lay philosophy? Yet in his palace full of pagan marbles the pope actually preaches all this. It is here, and certainly not among the modernists, that the gospel is still believed.

Of course, it is open to any one to say that there is a nobler religion possible without these trammels and this officialdom, that there is a deeper philosophy than this supernaturalistic rationalism, that there is a sweeter life than this legal piety. Perhaps: I think the pagan Greeks, the Buddhists, the Mohammedans would have much to say for themselves before the impartial tribunal of human nature and reason. But they are not Christians and do not wish to be. No more, in their hearts, are the modernists, and they should feel it beneath their dignity to pose as such; indeed the more sensitive of them already feel it. To say they are not Christians at heart, but diametrically opposed to the fundamental faith and purpose of Christianity, is not to say they may not be profound mystics (as many Hindus, Jews, and pagan Greeks have been), or excellent scholars, or generous philanthropists. But the very motive that attaches them to Christianity is worldly and un-Christian. They wish to preserve the continuity of moral traditions; they wish the poetry of life to flow down to them uninterruptedly and copiously from all the ages. It is an amiable and wise desire; but it shows that they are men of the Renaissance, pagan and pantheistic in their pro-

founder sentiment, to whom the hard and narrow realism of official Christianity is offensive just because it presupposes that Christianity is true.

Yet even in this historical and poetical allegiance to Christianity I suspect the modernists suffer from a serious illusion. They think the weakness of the church lies in its not following the inspirations of the age. But when this age is past, might not that weakness be a source of strength again? For an idea ever to be fashionable is ominous, since it must afterwards be always old-fashioned. No doubt it would be dishonest in any of us now, who see clearly that Noah surely did not lead all the animals two by two into the Ark, to say that we believe he did so, on the ground that stories of that kind are rather favourable to the spread of religion. No doubt such a story, and even the fables essential to Christian theology, are now incredible to most of us. But on the other hand it would be stupid to assume that what is incredible to you or me now must always be incredible to mankind. What was foolishness to the Greeks of St. Paul's day spread mightily among them one or two hundred years later; and what is foolishness to the modernist of to-day may edify future generations. The imagination is suggestible and there is nothing men will not believe in matters of religion. These rational persuasions by which we are swayed, the conventions of unbelieving science and unbelieving history, are superficial growths; yesterday they did not exist, to-morrow they may have disappeared. This is a doctrine which the modernist philosophers themselves emphasise, as does M. Bergson, whom some of them follow, and say the Catholic church itself ought to follow in order to be saved—for prophets are constitutionally without a sense of humour. These philosophers maintain that intelligence is merely a convenient method of picking one's way through the world of matter, that it is a falsification of life, and wholly unfit to grasp the roots of it. We may well be of another opinion, if we think the roots of life are not in consciousness but in nature, which intelligence alone can reveal; but we must agree that in life itself intelligence is a superficial growth, and easily blighted, and that the experience of the vanity of the world, of sin, of salvation, of miracles, of strange revelations, and of mystic loves is a far deeper, more primitive, and therefore probably more lasting human possession than is that of clear historical or scientific ideas.

Now religious experience, as I have said, may take other forms than the Christian, and within Christianity it may take other forms than the

Catholic; but the Catholic form is as good as any intrinsically for the devotee himself, and it has immense advantages over its probable rivals in charm, in comprehensiveness, in maturity, in internal rationality, in external adaptability; so much so that a strong anti-clerical government, like the French, cannot safely leave the church to be overwhelmed by the forces of science, good sense, ridicule, frivolity, and avarice (all strong forces in France), but must use violence as well to do it. In the English church, too, it is not those who accept the deluge, the resurrection, and the sacraments only as symbols that are the vital party, but those who accept them literally; for only these have anything to say to the poor, or to the rich, that can refresh them. In a frank supernaturalism, in a tight clericalism, not in a pleasant secularisation, lies the sole hope of the church. Its sole dignity also lies there. It will not convert the world; it never did and it never could. It will remain a voice crying in the wilderness; but it will believe what it cries, and there will be some to listen to it in the future, as there have been many in the past. As to modernism, it is suicide. It is the last of those concessions to the spirit of the world which half-believers and double-minded prophets have always been found making; but it is a mortal concession. It concedes everything; for it concedes that everything in Christianity, as Christians hold it, is an illusion.





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