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## Modern, not Modernist.

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It is as impossible, as it is undesirable, to isolate any religion, even the Christian, from the other interests and activities of man, and to protect its doctrine and practice against the influence of the contemporary environment. Although the Christian religion is concerned with the eternal and infinite reality of God, yet it relates that reality to man in time and space; the content of the revelation may be supra-historical as is its source, but its mode as for man, affected by and effecting history, must be historical. Hence the theology, which interprets, defends, and commends the revelation to be intelligible and convincing must be 'modern,' that is, dependent on and adapted to its own time and place in its presentation. We cannot be saved from the present dangers, difficulties, or distresses of the Christian faith by a return to Calvin or Luther, although a study of them may make the modern theologian more competent in knowledge and judgment for his task. He betrays his trust, if he is only a 'traditionalist,' repeating what has been handed down to him in the creeds, the confessions, or the systems of the past, without such critical scrutiny as will enable him to retain from his inheritance what he can with sincerity and candour confess as his personal conviction.

That there was last century a widespread and deep-rooted change, which we should not be exaggerating if we described as a theological revolution, can only be denied by those who have no ears to hear, and no mind to understand. Through that revolution I have in personal experience thought, suffered, and lived. It is not my purpose here to describe the change in the contents of Christian doctrine, but I shall discuss the influences which have wrought the change.

I. (1) The nineteenth century was indeed a 'wonderful century' in scientific discovery and resultant mechanical inventions; these inventions in contributing to human welfare made science popular, and gave it confidence in itself and authority in general thinking. An erroneous dogma of verbal inspiration, and of the general authority of the Holy Scriptures led the Church unwisely, and much to its own discredit, to oppose the conclusions of science as contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures. Attempts were made to reconcile Genesis and geology; the days in Gn 1 might be a 'thousand years,' for with God a thousand years

are as one day. With the Darwinian hypothesis of man's animal descent, and the theory of evolution there could, however, be no compromise; and both were denounced in sermons and books as damnable heresy. But, just as in the fable, the barking of the dog did not stop the shining of the moon, after some controversy, not marked on either side by either courtesy or charity, the Church retreated and left the field to science. By this withdrawal of a large field of knowledge the authority of the Bible has been restricted; and the doctrine of its inspiration modified. Theologians have learned to accommodate themselves to the new situation, and, while still insisting on the truth of God as Creator, have left to science the description of the mode of Creation. Many informed and intelligent believers have been relieved of mental confusion and conflict, and saved from distress of soul, or even abandonment of faith, by this defeat of erroneous dogmatism.

(2) To the Christian reason and conscience, as it was developing, we may confidently hold under the guidance of the Spirit, there was much to offend in the Old Testament religion and morals, and the tortuous efforts of apologists were not successful in removing the offence. The breach in the solid wall of futile defence of Biblical infallibility, made by science, was widened in moral and religious interests. How welcome, then, to many baffled minds and bewildered hearts was the Higher Criticism, which by evidence derived from the Bible itself by accurate and extensive scrutiny turned the Bible itself into a witness against this dogmatic error. The term 'criticism' suggested censure, not unbiased judgment, and the term 'higher,' a claim to superiority by its exponents, and full advantage was taken by the opponents of the movement of the impression thus made on the uninstructed. That critics differ in their conclusions, and even change their minds, is no disproof of the soundness of the method of exact observation and tested inference—the method of science, which has achieved such discoveries, applied, *mutatis mutandis*, in another sphere. Another defeat of the Church has been a gain for the Christian religion, relieving faith of the incubus on reason and conscience which this erroneous dogmatism was imposing.

(3) A complementary, though not so immediately obvious, influence has been the comparative

study of religions. When it came to be more generally known that other religions also had their Sacred Scriptures, and that similar claims of verbal inspiration were in some cases made for them, the Bible was taken out of its isolation, and its claims, as well as those of other Scriptures, came to be more closely scrutinized, if intellectual consistency was to be maintained. Not all Christian theologians have allowed themselves to be so influenced. I know one estimable missionary who applies these modern methods to the Koran but insists on leaving the Bible untouched by them. Having pursued the comparative study of religions for a number of years, I have come to the conclusion that religion is universal in mankind and necessary to manhood; that Christianity must not be isolated from all other religions as alone true and all others false; that the unprejudiced comparison does not rob the Christian faith of its uniqueness as the sole revelation of the God, Father of all, who is reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ the Son, and realizing that reconciliation by His Spirit in men; but that the Christian theologian must place the revelation which he is interpreting in the wider context of God's revelation of Himself in Nature and history and the other religions of the world.

(4) The œcumenical creeds, which we may highly esteem as for their own era 'modern,' but which we cannot now accept as an adequate and authoritative interpretation of the Christian faith for all times, employ the categories of Greek philosophy; and it is not an adequate defence to claim that these are permanent. Certainly the category of substance and accident is permanent, and our thought cannot dispense with it, but it is not adequate, because it does not differentiate material and personal substance, as ancient thought had no adequate conception of personality; and for the doctrine of the Trinity or the Incarnation such a conception is indispensable for the thought of to-day. As used in the doctrine of the Trinity the word *person* is misleading, and has resulted in a popular tritheism, which obscures the essential Christian monotheism. The term *substance*, used to express the unity of the persons, perpetuates a static and not dynamic conception of God essential for our modern theism. In the doctrine of Christ the term 'person' needs to get a far fuller connotation than its ancient use gives, and that would demand a far closer relation of the two natures (a term which need not be altered) than the four adverbs of the creed of Chalcedon would allow. That our Lord was divine, that He was human, and that He was

One, is the permanent truth which must at all costs be maintained as essential to Christian faith, although modern philosophy may supply us with the more adequate categories.

II. In all my endeavours to restate the Gospel for to-day I have been affected by all these influences, and have in all sincerity accepted, and in all candour expressed, whatever modifications of the inherited theology of the Church new knowledge and fresh judgment might demand. But I disclaim being a *modernist*, for those who are boastfully displaying that label are either altogether rejecting truths which I believe belong to the permanent deposit of the Faith, or are so modifying the statement of them as to put them beyond recognition for the ordinary believer. To oppose modernism to the 'traditional' theology is by the adjective applied to beg the question, for many who refuse to call themselves modernists do not accept an unexamined tradition on authority, but have tested, and have proved the worth of what they have retained in just as modern a spirit and by just as modern methods as the modernists claim to be their monopoly. Before dealing with some specific instances of the differences, a divergence in method may be discussed. The 'religious historical' school in Germany added to the criticism (literary and historical) of the documents, two other principles—correlation and comparison—and used them in such a way as to lead to conclusions which criticism alone would not have reached. The one principle—correlation—was derived from science, and the other—comparison—from the study of other religions, although of course neither principle belongs exclusively to either sphere, but the difference is one of emphasis. Both principles are necessary and legitimate, and only their unqualified application calls for criticism. Each of these may now be examined.

(1) Although science disclaims the metaphysical conception of cause as productive power, yet its whole procedure depends on correlation of antecedent and consequent, and wherever possible their quantitative equivalence. We must not say that motion produces heat, but that heat follows motion, and their quantitative relation can be determined. In human history such sequence can be observed, although it is not so uniform, and the correlation can never be so exact. The determinist challenges the witness of self-consciousness to personal liberty, and correlates actions to motives; but he cannot unerringly predict what action will be, as he has no infallible knowledge of all motives. There is, however, sufficient uniformity in human conduct to

justify generalizations about cause and effect (to use the common terms) which have a more or less degree of probability. The historian is entirely justified in explaining events by examining their antecedent conditions, in sacred no less than in secular history. But if, as has already been indicated, the revelation of the infinite and eternal reality in time and space has a supra-historical as well as a historical character, he is not entitled on the principle of correlation to rule out as impossible or even incredible events, for which there is as adequate evidence as he would ordinarily accept, because he cannot explain them in the ordinary way. It is not credulity to hold the convictions that God who is over all, as well as in and through all, may for the fulfilment of His own purpose of saving men in a world which sin has disordered, act in and through Nature or men in a way which the order of Nature and history cannot explain, so far as that order is known to us. God as above all may have reserves which allow Him an initiative congruous with His character and purpose. The evidence for any alleged miracle needs to be rigorously scrutinized and this congruity must be seriously considered before acceptance of miracle; but it is not for the historians as such with this principle of correlation to rule it out of impartial considerations.

(2) When we compare men with one another, the resemblances in their influence on our conception or estimate of manhood will probably outweigh the differences; but we should misunderstand and do wrong to a man if we ignored the differences, and regarded him as only a man in the crowd. We do recognize exceptional men, geniuses, who rise above and reach beyond the common level of human capacity and achievement. As God reveals Himself to men through men, may not the men whom He chooses and endows as His organs possess what even geniuses in other spheres do not, a consciousness of an immediate contact and an intimate communion with God, a receptivity for and responsiveness to God, that justifies their certainty that their message came from God, and their confidence in bidding men heed and obey. If God willed to complete His Creation by a manifestation and a communication as certain and complete as the conditions of His own Creation allowed, are we warranted in reducing the Incarnate Word to the measure of an ordinary man, real as His manhood was?

(3) To the direct challenge of both these principles, when applied in an unqualified way, some more general considerations may be added. (a) Theology

is compelled to recognize the divine transcendence; the infinite and eternal reality is not exhausted in any or all of the phases or the stages of the finite and temporal actuality of Nature and history. We must ascribe to God reserves of wisdom, goodness, and power beyond all already manifested. God is immanent in the world, but cannot be measured by that immanence. (b) The theory of evolution is now generally accepted, and in the theistic interpretation it witnesses to the progressive manifestation, matter, life, mind, personality, at each stage something above and beyond the already existent. Even non-theistic philosophy speaks of *creative* in *emergent* evolution. Who can say that Nature and history, as ordinarily known, are and must be final? (c) The author or the artist tries to put as much of himself into the product of his activity as his medium will allow. May we not dare to believe that God so desired to express Himself in His Creation as fully as the limitations and conditions of created existence allowed; and thus the *Word* became *flesh*, the person in whom the *transcendent* was revealed beyond and above the existent *immanent* activity? (d) Explain it as we may, there is the mystery of pain and sin; for the relief of the one and the remedy of the other may not demands be made (and met) in the reserves of God, for which in a painless and sinless world there might have been no need? To redeem mankind from sin, and reconcile men unto Himself, it is not unreasonable to believe that in the fullness of the time God sent His Son to be Saviour. This brief indication of a Christian philosophy must here suffice to show that to be 'modern' in the four respects described in the first section, is not necessarily to be bound by an unqualified application of the two principles of the religious-historical school, discussed in the second section. In the third section, to which I pass, I give only two illustrations from 'modernist' practice which I feel justified in rejecting, while remaining 'modern.'

III. (1) The principle of *comparison* leads many *modernists* to reject what they call the 'traditional' doctrine of the person of Christ, and so to insist on the real humanity as to reduce Him to the measure of ordinary manhood. His uniqueness may be asserted; but the confession of His divinity is at once neutralized by claiming divinity for all men; and the difference of nature the creeds assert is made a difference of degree. I am as zealous to maintain the real humanity as any modernist, and yet decline to make ordinary manhood the measure of that reality. God made man in His image and likeness, but He did not make him *god*. Divine

nature has perfections human nature lacks, and human nature limitations which cannot be ascribed to divine nature. God is *capax finiti*: He can manifest and communicate Himself as man; man is *capax infiniti*: he can receive and respond to the manifestations and communications; the Word can become flesh, and flesh the Word. But adding a word to sharpen one of Paul's contrasts in order to apply it here; the earthen vessel is not identical with, although it contains and conveys the heavenly treasure. God is not man, nor man God, although their affinity allows a community in the one personal unity of the Incarnate Word. The *Kenosis* of God in the earthly life of Jesus in order to the *Plerosis* of the heavenly reign of Christ our Lord we must affirm; but not seek to minimize the mystery of the divine condescension in an illegitimate exaltation of man as divine. We must by all means suspend judgment on any feature of the earthly life of Jesus, where the evidence is inadequate, or reject anything which adequate evidence contradicts; we must be *critical*, but also watchful not to allow any assumption, such as this principle of *comparison*, to vitiate an unprejudicial and impartial scrutiny of the evidence. My criticism of the modernist is that he is not critical enough in his own assumptions. It is reasonable to believe in the grounds briefly indicated in the last section, that the redemption of man from sin and his reconciliation to God in Christ marks a new stage in God's creative activity, above and beyond the human, and that Christ the Incarnate Word is the premise, the pattern, and the power of that process of new creation, by which sinful men are being transformed, changed into His likeness, not to become divine, as He was, but perfectly human, and thus fully real.

(2) One of the gains of modern scholarship is that our increased knowledge of the historical environment in the Apostolic Age enables us to interpret the contents of the New Testament with an adequacy and accuracy hitherto impossible, although we must never claim infallibility for our judgments. The principle of *correlation* is justified as such. We can understand the teaching of Jesus, if we recognize its antecedents in the Old Testament,

or in contemporary Judaism; light is thrown on some of the ideas He used by examining the Aramaic equivalents of the Greek terms in the New Testament. Paul and John (to use the traditional name without committal to the tradition of authorship) were affected by their Hellenistic environment, Jewish as modified by Gentile thought. Scholars are by no means unanimous as to the extent of that influence. It is not quite so certain, as modernists often assume, that Paul's doctrine of the Atonement was derived from the mystery cults of paganism, or that John's doctrine of the Logos was drawn from Greek philosophy and carried with it all the connotation of the term there. Admitting as fully as the evidence demands that in the formulations of doctrine the Hellenistic environment exercised an influence, although the extent of it may be disputed, to trace the source of the terms used is not itself a justification for assigning no more value to their doctrine than to this source. To describe the Pauline and Johannine teaching as a first-century theosophy is to ignore what was the very core of their teaching, the reality which was the object of their faith, and which in their teaching they were attempting to make intelligible. Unless they were deceivers or self-deceived their doctrine rested on their experience of the saving grace of the Risen and Living Lord. Was the Christ with whom Paul was crucified unto sin, and rose again in newness of life unto God, an illusion? Did the Master, who abode in John the disciple and in whom he abode, bringing forth the fruit of his 'spiritual Gospel,' not exist at all except as a fond memory? As regards the 'empty tomb' there may be suspense of judgment among Christian believers, and to base the belief in the Resurrection upon it is a blunder in Christian apologetics. As to the nature of the body in which Christ appeared, we speculate in vain. But to affirm that the Christian faith produced the fact, and not that the fact restored and sustained the faith, is to build the Christian Church on sand and not on rock. Paul and John were interpreting the true experience of the divine reality in Christ, and that faith still endures invincible.