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THE *SACRORUM ANTISTITUM* AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE OATH AGAINST MODERNISM

September 1 of this year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the last, and in some ways the most important, of the three main anti-Modernist pronouncements issued by the Holy See during the brilliant reign of St. Pius X. This document was the Motu proprio *Sacrorum antistitum.* The other two basic anti-Modernist documents are, of course, the Holy Office decree *Lamentabili sane exitu,* dated July 3, 1907, and the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis,* issued September 8 of that same year.

The *Sacrorum antistitum* is best known because it contains the text of the famous anti-Modernist oath and the rules prescribing when and by whom this oath is to be taken. Because of the tremendous intrinsic importance of the oath itself and by reason of its function in the doctrinal life of the Catholic Church, the papal document containing this oath definitely deserves serious study by the present generation of theologians. The *Sacrorum antistitum* brings out the basic objectives which the saintly Pius X hoped to attain through the taking of the oath. These objectives, which are also the ends St. Pius X worked to achieve through the writing of the Motu proprio itself, are expressed very clearly in the introduction and in the conclusion to this document.

Since the entire text of the *Sacrorum antistitum* is not very generally available here and now, it will be helpful to see a translation of its most important parts, including the introduction and conclusion. The following is a translation of the introduction to this Motu proprio.

THE INTRODUCTION

We believe that no bishop is ignorant of the fact that the wily Modernists have not abandoned their plans for disturbing the peace of the Church since they were unmasked by the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis.* For they have not ceased to seek out new recruits and to gather them into a secret alliance. Nor have they ceased, along with their new associates, to inject the poison of their own teachings into the veins of the Christian body-politic by turning out anonymous

or pseudonymous books and articles. If, after a re-reading of the above-mentioned encyclical *Pascendi,* this audacity, which has caused Us so much grief, be considered very carefully, it will become quite apparent that these men are just as the encyclical describes them: enemies who are all the more to be feared by reason of their very nearness to us. They are men who pervert their ministry in such a way as to bait their hooks with poisoned meat in order to catch the unwary. They carry with them a form of doctrine in which the summary of all errors is contained.

While this plague is spreading abroad over that very part of the Lord's field from which the best fruits might be expected, it is the duty of all Bishops to exert themselves in defence of the Catholic faith and most diligently to see to it that the integrity of the divine deposit suffers no loss. Likewise it is most definitely Our duty to obey the commands of Christ the Saviour, who gave to Peter, to whose position of authority We, though unworthy, have succeeded, the order: "Confirm thy brethren." Thus, so that the souls of the good may be strengthened in the present struggle, We have considered it opportune to repeat the following statements and commands of the encyclical *Pascendi.*[1]

The last words of this introduction to the *Sacrorum antistitum* show that the first section of the body of this Motu proprio is a long citation from the disciplinary part of the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis.* To this citation is attached an appendix, having to do with legislation concerning seminaries. The second part of the body of the text of the *Sacrorum antistitum* contains the text of the anti-Modernist oath, together with the rules prescribing when and by whom his oath is to be taken, and the other directives which accompanied the command to take the oath. The third section is merely a statement in Latin of a text on preaching, originally issued in Italian, on the orders of Pope Leo XIII, by the Congregation of Bishops and of Regulars, on July 31, 1894.

The introduction to the *Sacrorum antistitum* contains some badly needed lessons for the priests of our own time. Incidentally it contains some reminders of truths in the theological and in the historical orders which are far too seldom insisted upon today. It will, in my judgment, be definitely helpful to take cognizance of some of these truths at this time.

[1] The Latin text of the *Sacrorum antistitum* is to be found in the *Codicis iuris canonici fontes,* cura Petri Cardinalis Gasparri editi (Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1933), III, 774-90. This particular secton is on p. 774.

(1) Basically the *Sacrorum antistitum* and the anti-Modernist oath it contains were intended by St. Pius X as works he was required to perform in order to carry out his own divinely imposed responsibility to confirm the faith of his fellow members of the Catholic Church and to strengthen the efforts of the Bishops to see to it that their flocks received the divinely revealed message in all its integrity and purity.

For the sake of both fidelity to revealed teaching and of historical veracity it is absolutely imperative that our contemporary Catholic scholars take cognizance of the truth of St. Pius X's claim about his intention. Actually the responsibility which St. Pius X had assumed when he accepted the burden of the papacy demanded that he take the most effective means at his disposal to protect the faith of Catholics. Quite obviously the greatest danger to the faith of the members of the true Church of Jesus Christ exists when some members of this Church actually teach or even show sympathy for doctrine contradictory to or incompatible with the body of Catholic dogma without receiving any reproof from those whom God has commissioned and obligated to protect the purity and the integrity of the Catholic faith. St. Pius X was acutely conscious of the fact that many influential Catholics were teaching or encouraging erroneous doctrines opposed to the divinely revealed Catholic message long after those erroneous doctrines had been pointed out and condemned by the highest teaching authority within the Church. And the saintly Pope was brilliant enough to realize that, unless he took some sort of drastic action, a great number of Catholics might be persuaded to imagine that *de facto* the Church at least tacitly tolerated the doctrinal deviations of the Modernists and their sympathizers. Thus he directed the severe commands of the *Sacrorum antistitum* towards the protection of the Catholic faith that was his most important responsibility as the Vicar of Christ on earth.

It was and it still is the contention of the Modernists, together with their sympathizers and their dupes, that St. Pius X in some way or another went beyond the bounds imposed by prudence and charity in the war he waged against the heresy of Modernism. As a matter of fact, even after the regular investigations involved in the process of his beatification had been completed, the Sacred Congregation of Rites considered it best to commission its historical section to conduct a special investigation into the validity of this

particular contention. This strict investigation, which made use of all available testimony and of the very abundant documentary material pertinent to the question, brought out very clearly the fact that St. Pius X, in issuing the *Sacrorum antistitum* and in taking the other steps against the Modernists and their supporters during the latter days of his pontificate, had been doing only what the demands of his high office demanded of him.[2]

One of the most striking indications of this is to be found in a well known statement attributed to Pope Benedict XV. The *Disquisitio* of the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation of Rites reprints this statement in a part of the testimony offered by Msgr. Hoenning-O'Carroll in the course of the inquiry into the virtues of Pius X held in Venice.

> Particularly his [Pius X's] political dealings with France and the steps he took against Modernism were attacked as imprudent and exaggerated . . . When Father Mauro Serafini was having an audience with Pope Benedict XV, the Pope said to him: "Now that I am sitting on this Chair, I see very well how right Pius X was. While I was the Sostituto in the Secretariate of State, and even while I was Archbishop of Bologna, I did not always share the thought of Pius X, but now I have to realize how right he was."[3]

Monsignor Hoenning-O'Carroll testified that he learned of this statement of Pope Benedict XV from Monsignor Pescini. Despite the fact that this particular witness knew the story only through hearsay, the statement itself seems very well attested. It seems to reflect the mind of Pope Benedict XV.

In any event there is ample and compelling evidence that the *Sacrorum antistitum* and the other anti-Modernistic documents

[2] The documentation and the results of this investigation are contained in the *Disquisitio circa quasdam obiectiones modum agendi Servi Dei [Pii Papae X] respicientes in Modernismi debellatione, una cum summario additionali ex officio compilato,* which is n. 77 of the printed documents of the Sectio historica of the Sacra Rituum Congregatio. The work was edited by Father Antonelli, O.F.M. It is mentioned and used rather well by Pierre Fernessole, in his *Pie X: Essai historique* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1953), II, 237-51. It is employed brilliantly by Fr. Raymond Dulac in his two famous articles, "Les devoirs du journaliste catholique selon le Bienheureux Pie X," and "Simple note sur le Sodalitium Pianum," in *La pensée catholique,* n. 23 (1952), 68-87; 88-93.

[3] *Disquisitio,* p. 127. Cited by Fernessole, *op. cit.,* II, 249.

issued by St. Pius X were actually called for and really required by reason of the danger to the Catholic faith which had been caused by the activity of the Modernists, their sympathizers, and their dupes, within the true Church of Jesus Christ.

(2) At the time the *Sacrorum antistitum* was being written, the integrity of the Catholic faith itself was being seriously threatened. Within the Catholic Church itself a definite and formidable effort was being made to persuade members of the true Church to reject as antiquated and outdated certain teachings which were actually presented by the Church's *magisterium* as belonging to the deposit of divine public revelation. This effort was being made by the Modernists, most of whom were members of the Catholic Church. The teachings which these men had attempted to impose upon the Church had been specifically and authoritatively condemned by the Holy See three years before the *Sacrorum antistitum* was issued.

Thus it is immensely important to realize that the teachings against which the *Sacrorum antistitum* was directed were being put forward by an obdurate group of men whose heresies had been indicated, denounced, and condemned three years before this Motu proprio was written. This, incidentally, is quite at variance with the unhistorical statements of some contemporary sympathizers with Modernism and the Modernists. Writers of this sort have tried to delude their fellow Catholics into imagining that, upon the appearance of the *Lamentabili sane exitu* and the *Pascendi dominici gregis,* most of the men who had been teaching and defending the doctrines condemned in these two documents quickly and humbly submitted to the teaching authority of the Holy See. The text of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* and also, be it noted, the text of the *Ad beatissimi,* the inaugural encyclical of Pope Benedict XV, show that no such reaction took place.[4] The well defined group which had been proposing and favoring the propositions condemned in the

[4] It is quite evident that Pope Benedict XV considered the Modernism condemned by St. Pius X as an influential movement in the Church four years after the *Sacrorum antistitum* was written. Thus we read in the *Ad beatissimi:* "And so there came into being the monstrous errors of Modernism, which Our predecessor rightly designated as the gathering together of all the heresies, and which he solemnly condemned. To the fullest extent possible, Venerable Brethren, We here renew that condemnation. *And, because this pestiferous contagion has not yet been overcome, but even now creeps in here and there, even though in a hidden manner,* We exhort all

Lamentabili and in the *Pascendi* insolently continued to work for acceptance of their errors within the Church even after St. Pius X had denounced and condemned them.

(3) In the *Sacrorum antistitum* St. Pius X speaks out very clearly of the existence of a secret alliance or a *foedus clandestinum* among the Modernists of his day. For one reason or another, this truth, observed and stated by St. Pius X, and clearly evident to any person who takes the trouble to study the history of the Modernist movement, has always been singularly distasteful to sympathizers with Modernism and with the Modernists. It seems to have been precisely in order to cause confusion on this particular point that the men who have been partial to the Modernists have gone to such extreme lengths to delude people into imagining that the opposition to Loisy, Von Hügel, and their ilk within the Catholic Church was fundamentally the work of a secret alliance of sinister and reactionary Catholics. It would certainly appear that the ridiculous and mendacious propaganda directed against the Sodalitium Pianum and against Monsignor Umberto Benigni, even over the course of the past few years,[5] can best be explained as an attempt to cover up the fact that there was a *foedus clandestinum* connected with and inherent in the Modernist movement.

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most diligently against any infection of this evil, to which you might rightly apply the words that Job said on another subject: 'It is a fire that devoureth even to destruction, and rooteth up all things that spring.' And We will that Catholic men should turn away in disgust, not only from the errors, but from the very mentality, or, as they call it, the spirit of the Modernists" (Cf. *Codicis iuris canonici fontes*, III, 842).

It must also be remembered that the errors denounced by the late Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Humani generis* definitely were Modernistic.

[5] Perhaps the most insolent and naïve of these attacks is that contained in the article "'La Sapinière,' ou brève histoire de l'organisation intégriste," written by someone who used the pseudonym "Louis Davallon," in the May 15, 1955, number of Follie't's *Chronique sociale de France*, pp. 241-62. A brief discussion of this unfortunate and thoroughly untrustworthy article will be found in Fenton, "Some Recent Writings in the Field of Fundamental Dogmatic Theology," Part II, in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, CXXXIV, 5 (May, 1956), 340-45. It is tragic that an otherwise respectable book, *The Life of Benedict XV*, by Walter H. Peters (Milwaukee: Bruce 1959), incorporates some of this nonsensical propaganda against Monsignor Benigni into its chapter "Modernists and Integralists" (pp. 42-53).

(4) The introduction to the *Sacrorum antistitum* takes cognizance of the fact that most of the genuinely dangerous supporters of the Modernist movement, the men against whose efforts the *Sacrorum antistitum* and its commands were particularly directed, were priests active within the Catholic Church itself. St. Pius X took cognizance of the fact that such priests were actually perverting their own ministry. They were guilty of using their priestly power and their priestly position to counter, rather than to advance, the work of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Basically the work of the priesthood is directed towards the glory of God, which is to be achieved and obtained in the salvation of souls. This objective is to be obtained only by those who pass from this life living the life of sanctifying grace. And the life of sanctifying grace cannot exist apart from the truth faith, until such time as the faith itself is replaced by the Beatific Vision. Thus the priestly ministry in the true Church of Jesus Christ necessarily seeks to induce men to accept God's supernatural teaching with the certain assent of divine faith and works to increase the perfection and the intensity of the faith in those who already possess this virtue. Hence any effort on the part of a Catholic priest to influence people to reject or to pass over a truth revealed by God and proposed as such by the Church's *magisterium* definitely constitutes a perversion of the sacerdotal ministry.

(5) St. Pius X describes the Modernists as men "who are all the more to be feared by reason of their very nearness to us." It would be difficult indeed to appreciate the position of the Church in the twentieth century without realizing the objectivity and the shrewdness of this observation.

A man is to be feared by the Church, or by the members of the Church, in the measure that this man intends and is genuinely able to harm the Church, or to counteract and negate the salvific mission of Our Lord's Mystical Body in this world. And this happens especially when non-members of the Church are influenced not to accept its divine message and not to seek entrance into this society, and when members of the Church are pressured to reject Our Lord, or His love, or His divine teaching. It is most important to remember that the only real and serious damage to the cause of Christ is done when effective efforts are made to nullify and to

counteract the work the Church does as the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

With its insistence that the Modernists and their sympathizers were "enemies who are all the more to be feared by reason of their very nearness to us," the introduction to the *Sacrorum antistitum* takes cognizance of the fact that, during our own times at least, non-members of the Church have, generally speaking, not been able to damage the Church to any very considerable extent. Quite obviously, despite their manifest and intense ill will, people like those who used to be associated with the old *Menace* and the Ku Klux Klan, and those who are now associated with groups like P...U, are not particularly formidable adversaries of Our Lord, His Church, or His message. They have certainly helped to stir up and further to envenom antipathy towards the Catholic Church on the part of ignorant non-Catholics who were previously ill disposed towards the Church. But it would hardly seem likely that any Catholic has ever been turned against Christ or against the Church's divinely revealed message as a result of anything that has ever been said or written by these rabble-rousers. And it seems highly unlikely that any individual has been excluded from the Beatific Vision by reason of anything he has said or done by reason of their influence.

On the other hand, no one has ever been as well placed to harm the true Church and to counteract its essential work as a Catholic priest in good standing. If such a man, by his preaching, his teaching, or his writing, actually sets forth the kind of teaching condemned in the *Lamentabili sane exitu* and in the *Pascendi dominici gregis,* or if he works to discredit the loyal defenders of Catholic dogma without receiving any repudiation or reproof from those to whom the apostolic deposit of divine revelation has been entrusted, the Catholic people are in grave danger of being deceived.

The Modernists and their most influential sympathizers were, in great part, drawn from the ranks of the Catholic clergy. Thus they were, in the words of the introduction to the *Sacrorum antistitum,* the "enemies who are all the more to be feared by reason of their very nearness to us." These Catholics who taught or favored Modernism were the men whose influence within the true Church of Jesus Christ St. Pius X sought to counter by the teaching and the directives contained in the *Sacrorum antistitum.*

(6) Finally, in the introduction to this famous Motu proprio, St. Pius X makes it very clear indeed that the Bishops of the Catholic Church were bound in conscience by the obligations of their office to act energetically against this teaching that contradicted the divinely revealed truth proposed as such by the true Church. The "defence of the Catholic faith" and strenuous efforts "to see to it that the integrity of the divine deposit suffers no loss" are definitely not works of supererogation. These are the duties prescribed by Our Lord Himself for the leaders of the Church which He has purchased by His blood.

THE CONCLUSION TO THE SACRORUM ANTISTITUM

The conclusion to this document, the last of the three great anti-Modernist declarations issued by the Holy See during the reign of St. Pius X, is even more enlightening than the introduction. In this we see how St. Pius X enunciated, more clearly than in any other document, the most fundamental position of the Modernists. The text of this conclusion follows:

> Moved by the seriousness of the evil that is increasing every day, an evil which We cannot put off confronting without the most grave danger, We have decided to issue and to repeat these commands. For it is no longer a case, as it was in the beginning, of dealing with disputants who come forward in the clothing of sheep. Now we are faced with open and bitter enemies from within our own household, who, in agreement with the outstanding opponents of the Church, are working for the overthrow of the faith. They are men whose audacity against the wisdom that has come down from heaven increases daily. They arrogate to themselves the right to correct this revealed wisdom as if it were something corrupt, to renew it as if it were something that had become obsolete, to improve it and to adapt it to the dictates, the progress, and the comfort of the age as if it had been opposed to the good of society and not merely opposed to the levity of a few men.
>
> To counter such attempts against the evangelical doctrine and the ecclesiastical tradition, there will never be sufficient vigilance or too much severity on the part of those to whom the faithful care of the sacred deposit has been entrusted.[6]

In this conclusion to the *Sacrorum antistitum,* St. Pius X expressly recognizes the fact that the Modernists and their sympathizers, the anti-anti-Modernists, were actually working, in agree-

[6] The text is in *Codicis iuris canonici fontes,* III, 789 f.

ment with the most bitter enemies of the Catholic Church, for the destruction of the Catholic faith. It is interesting and highly important to note exactly what St. Pius X said. He definitely did not claim that these men were working directly to destroy the Church as a society. It is quite obvious that, given the intimate connection between the Church and the faith, a connection so close and perfect that the Church itself may be defined as the *congregatio fidelium*, the repudiation of the Catholic faith would inevitably lead to the dissolution of the Church. Yet, for the Modernists and for those who co-operated in their work, the immediate object of attack was always the faith itself. These individuals were perfectly willing that the Catholic Church should continue to exist as a religious society, as long as it did not insist upon the acceptance of that message which, all during the course of the previous centuries of its existence, it had proposed as a message supernaturally revealed by the Lord and Creator of heaven and earth. They were willing and even anxious to retain their membership in the Catholic Church, as long as they were not obliged to accept on the authority of divine faith such unfashionable dogmas as, for example, the truth that there is truly no salvation outside of the Church.

What these men were really working for was the transformation of the Catholic Church into an essentially non-doctrinal religious body. They considered that their era would be willing to accept the Church as a kind of humanitarian institution, vaguely religious, tastefully patriotic, and eminently cultural. And they definitely intended to tailor the Church to fit the needs and the tastes of their own era.

It must be understood, of course, that the Modernists and the men who aided their efforts did not expect the Catholic Church to repudiate its age-old formulas of belief. They did not want the Church to reject or to abandon the ancient creeds, or even any of those formularies in which the necessity of the faith and the necessity of the Church are so firmly and decisively stated. What they sought was a declaration on the part of the Church's *magisterium* to the effect that these old formulas did not, during the first decade of the twentieth century, carry the same meaning for the believing Catholic that they had carried when these formulas had first been drawn up. Or, in other words, they sought to force or to delude the teaching authority of Christ's Church into coming out with

the fatally erroneous proposition that what is accepted by divine faith in this century is *objectively* something different from what was believed in the Catholic Church on the authority of God revealing in previous times.

Thus the basic objective of Modernism was to reject the fact that, when he sets forth Catholic dogma, the Catholic teacher is acting precisely as an ambassador of Christ. The Modernists were men who were never quite able to grasp or to accept the truth that the teaching of the Catholic Church is, as the First Vatican Council designated the content of the Constitution *Dei Filius,* actually "the salutary doctrine of Christ," and not merely some kind of doctrine which has developed out of that teaching. And, in the final analysis, the position of the Modernists constituted the ultimate repudiation of the Catholic faith. If the teaching proposed by the Church as dogma is not actually and really the doctrine supernaturally revealed by God through Jesus Christ Our Lord, through the Prophets of the Old Testament who were His heralds, or through the Apostles who were His witnesses, then there could be nothing more pitifully inane than the work of the Catholic *magisterium.*

It is interesting to note the parallel between what St. Pius X says about the intentions of the Modernists and what his great predecessor, Pope Leo XIII, had to say about the basic premise of the errors he pointed out and condemned in his famed letter, the *Testem benevolentiae.* St. Pius X declares that the Modernists "arrogate to themselves the right to correct this revealed wisdom as if it were something corrupt, to renew it as if it were something that had become obsolete, to improve it and to adapt it to the dictates, the progress, and the comfort of the age as if it had been opposed to the good of society and not merely opposed to the levity of a few men." And Pope Leo XIII states:

> The principles on which the new opinions We have mentioned are based may be reduced to this: that in order the more easily to bring over to Catholic doctrine those who dissent from it, the Church ought to adapt herself somewhat to our advanced civilization, and, relaxing her ancient rigor, show some indulgence to modern theories and methods. Many think that this is to be understood not only with regard to the rule of life, but also to the doctrines in which the *deposit of faith* is contained. For they contend that it is opportune, in order to work in a more attractive way upon the wills of those who are not in

accord with us, to pass over certain heads of doctrines, as if of lesser moment, or so to soften them that they may not have the same meaning which the Church has invariably held.[7]

Thus, when we examine the actual texts of the *Testimonium benevolentiae* and of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* it becomes quite apparent that Pope Leo XIII and St. Pius X were engaged in combatting doctrinal deviations that actually sprang from an identical principle, the fantastically erroneous assumption that the supernatural communication of the Triune God could and should be brought up to date and given a certain respectability before modern society. The men who sustained the weird teachings condemned by Pope Leo XIII, a document which, incidentally, did not denounce any mere phantom body of doctrine, and the men who taught and protected the doctrinal monstrosities stigmatized in the *Lamentabili sane exitu* and in the *Pascendi dominici gregis,* based their errors on a common foundation. The false Americanism and the heresy of Modernism were both offshoots of doctrinal liberal Catholicism.

This belief that the meaning of the Church's dogmatic message was in some way subject to change and capable of being improved and brought up to date was definitely not an explicit part of the original or the more naïve stage of the liberal Catholic movement. The first components of liberal Catholicism, during the earlier days of the unfortunate Felicité De Lamenais, were religious indifferentism, some false concepts of human freedom, and the advocacy of a separation of Church and state as the ideal situation in a nation made up of members of the true Church. But, after these teachings had been forcefully repudiated by Pope Gregory XVI in his encyclical *Mirari vos arbitramur,* a new set of factors entered into this system. These were inserted into the fabric of liberal Catholicism because the leaders of this movement persisted in defending as legitimate Catholic doctrine this teaching which had been clearly and vigorously condemned by the supreme power of the Catholic *magisterium.* Most prominent among these newer components of liberal Catholicism were minimism, doctrinal subjectivism, and an insistence that there had been and that there had

[7] The text is in *Denz.,* n. 1967. This passage is translated in Father Wynne's edition of *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1903), p. 442.

to be at least some sort of change in the objective meaning of the Church's dogmatic message over the course of the centuries.[8]

The liberal Catholic since the time of Montalembert has been well aware of the fact that the basic theses he proposes as acceptable Catholic doctrine have been specifically and vehemently repudiated by the doctrinal authority of the Roman Church. If he is to continue to propose these teachings as a member of the Church, he is obliged by the very force of self-consistency to claim that the declarations of the *magisterium* which condemned his favorite theses do not at this moment mean objectively what they meant at the time they were issued. And, if such a claim is advanced about the *Mirari vos arbitramur,* there is very little to prevent its being put forward on the subject of the Athanasian Creed. Pope Leo XIII and St. Pius X were well aware of the fact that the advocates of the false Americanism and the teachers and the protectors of the Modernist heresy were employing this same discredited tactic.

This common basis of the false doctrinal Americanism and of the Modernist heresy is, like doctrinal indifferentism itself, ultimately a rejection of Catholic dogma as a genuine supernatural message or communication from the living God Himself. It would seem impossible for anyone to be blasphemous or silly enough to be convinced, on the one hand, that the dogmatic message of the Catholic Church is actually a *locutio Dei ad homines,* and to imagine, on the other hand, that he, a mere creature, could in some way improve that teaching or make it more respectable. The very fact that a man would be so rash as to attempt to bring the dogma of the Church up to date, or to make it more acceptable to those who are not privileged to be members of the true Church, indicates that this individual is not actually and profoundly convinced that this dogmatic teaching of the Catholic Church is a supernatural communication from the living and Triune God, the Lord and Creator of heaven and earth. It would be the heighth of blasphemy knowingly to set out to improve or to bring up to date what one would seriously consider to be a genuine message from the First Cause of the universe.

The conclusion to the *Sacrorum antistitum* brings out more clearly than any other statement of the Holy See the fact that

[8] Cf. Fenton, "The Components of Liberal Catholicism," in *The American Ecclesiastical Review,* CXXXIX, 1 (July, 1958), 36-53.

Modernism sprang from the same basic principle as did the false Americanism pointed out and proscribed in the *Testem benevolentiae* of Pope Leo XIII.

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF THE OATH IN THE SACRORUM ANTISTITUM

The main body of the first section of the *Sacrorum antistitum* is substantially a repetition of the legislative or disciplinary portion of the encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*. To this, however, in the text of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* is added an expression of the saintly Pontiff's concern for seminaries, ending with the vigorous command that henceforth the reading of *"diaria quaevis aut commentaria, quantumvis optima"* was strictly forbidden to seminarians *"onerata moderatorum conscientia qui ne id accidat religiose non caverint."*[9]

The second section of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* the one which contains and which deals with the Oath against Modernism, follows immediately after the statement of the prohibition of the reading of newspapers by seminarians. The first part of this section is of particular importance in that it shows very clearly the effect which St. Pius X wished to produce through the taking of the oath. The section begins as follows:

> But in order to do away with all suspicion that Modernism may secretly enter in [to the seminaries], not only do We will that the commands listed under n. 2 above be obeyed absolutely, but We also order that all teachers, before their first lectures at the beginning of the scholastic year, must show to their Bishop the text which each shall decide to use in teaching, or the questions or theses that are to be treated, and that furthermore throughout the year itself the kind of teaching of each course be examined, and that if such teaching be found to run counter to sound doctrine, that this will result in the immediate dismissal of the teacher. Finally [We will] that over and above the profession of faith [the teacher] should take an oath before his Bishop, according to the formula that follows, and that he should sign his name.[10]

The *Sacrorum antistitum* goes on to say that the profession of faith shall be that prescribed by Pope Pius IV, together with the additions, relative to the First Vatican Council, prescribed by the

[9] *Codicis iuris canonici fontes,* III, 782. [10] *Ibid.*

Decree of Jan. 20, 1877. And it likewise indicates the Church officials other than professors in seminaries who are bound by law to take the Oath.

Actually, then, in the immediate context of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* the command that seminary professors take Oath against Modernism stands out as one of four orders directed towards the prevention of the entrance of Modernism into ecclesiastical seminaries. These four directives are: (1) the strict carrying out of the legislation set down under n. 2 of the first section of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* (2) the submission by individual seminary professors to their Bishops at the beginning of the scholastic year of the textbooks they are going to use and of the theses they are going to propound, (3) the investigation (obviously by the competent and proper ecclesiastical authority), of the teaching offered in the various courses being given to the seminarians, and finally (4) the making of the Tridentine-Vatican profession of faith and the taking of the Oath against Modernism. The teacher is to sign his name to the Oath he has taken. The context would seem to indicate that it was the mind of St. Pius X that this Oath should be taken every year at the beginning of the academic term.

All of the other operations, including the taking of the Oath against Modernism, are subordinated to a certain extent to the legislation set down in the second sub-section of the first part of the *Sacrorum antistitum.* This sub-section, it must be remembered, is part of the text of the *Sacrorum antistitum* which is simply reproduced from the disciplinary portion of the *Pascendi dominici gregis.* The pertinent sub-section follows:

All these prescriptions, both Our own and those of Our predecessor, are to be kept in view whenever there is a question of choosing directors and teachers for seminaries and for Catholic universities. Anyone who in any way is found to be tainted with Modernism is to be excluded without compunction from these offices, whether of administration or of teaching, and those who already occupy such offices are to be removed. The same policy is to be followed with regard to those who openly or secretly lend support to Modernism, either by praising the Modernists and excusing their culpable conduct, or by carping at scholasticism, and the Fathers, and the *magisterium* of the Church, or by refusing obedience to ecclesiastical authority in any of its depositaries; and with regard to those who manifest a love of novelty in history, archeology, and biblical exegesis; and finally with regard to

those who neglect the sacred sciences or appear to prefer the secular [sciences] to them. On this entire subject, Venerable Brethren, and especially with regard to the choice of teachers, you cannot be too watchful or too careful, for as a rule the students are modelled according to the pattern of their teachers. Strong in the consciousness of your duty, act always in this matter with prudence and with vigor.

Equal diligence and severity are to be used in examining and selecting candidates for Holy Orders. Far, far from the clergy be the love of novelty! God hates the proud and the obstinate mind. In the future the doctorate in theology or in canon law must never be conferred on anyone who has not first of all made the regular course in scholastic philosophy. If such a doctorate be conferred, it is to be held as null and void. The rules laid down in 1896 by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for the clerics of Italy, both secular and regular, about the frequenting of universities, We now decree to be extended to all nations. Clerics and priests inscribed in a Catholic institute or university must not in the future follow in civil universities those courses for which there are chairs in the Catholic institutes to which they belong. If this has been permitted anywhere in the past, We order that it shall not be allowed in the future. Let the Bishops who form the governing boards of such institutes or universities see to it with all care that these Our commands be constantly observed.[11]

There can be no doubt whatsoever about the severity of the directives which are, in the text of the *Sacrorum antistitum*, immediately associated with the command that teachers in seminaries and in the ecclesiastical schools of Catholic universities take the Oath against Modernism, which appeared for the first time in that document. St. Pius X ordered that those who taught the errors condemned in the *Lamentabili sane exitu* and in the *Pascendi dominici gregis* should be dropped from any position on the administrative or on the teaching staff of any seminary or Catholic university, and that men who held such views must not, under any conditions whatsoever, be considered as prospects for membership in the administrations or in the professional corps of such institutions. Furthermore he ordered that the sympathizers with Modernism should be treated in exactly the same fashion. It is quite obvious that, in speaking of lovers of "novelties," the saintly Pontiff meant people who favored these propositions condemned by the Church and designated as Modernism.

[11] *Ibid.*, III, 776.

Then there were other directives. It was decreed that the doctorate in sacred theology and in canon law must never, in the future, be conferred on any person who had not taken a regular course in scholastic philosophy. Furthermore, St. Pius X ordered that priests connected with Catholic institutions of higher learning must not, in the future, take in non-Catholic institutions of higher studies courses which were being given in the schools with which they themselves were connected.

All of these directives went against the liberal Catholic spirit, of which Modernism was the outstanding expression. All of them were likewise unpopular, as calculated to arouse the antagonism of the enemies who attacked the Church from the outside. All of them were duly denounced and regretted as obscurantist. Catholics of mediocre intellectual attainments attracted praise to themselves for their disloyalty to Our Lord's cause and to His Church which was manifested in their disdainful reactions against these commands of Christ's Vicar on earth. Yet certainly and incontrovertibly the cause of Christ, the cause of truth, the cause of the Catholic faith, benefited to the extent that these rigorous directives were carried out.

It must definitely be understood that the most rigorous and the most important of these directives set forth in the disciplinary part of the *Pascendi dominici gregis,* and afterwards in the *Sacrorum antistitum,* are expressions of what we may call the natural law of the supernatural order. In other words, the obligation of the individual Bishop to exclude Modernists and sympathizers with Modernism from the administrations and from the professorial staffs of seminaries and of Catholic universities definitely did not begin with the first promulgation of this law by St. Pius X. Given the position and the obligation of the Bishop within the true Church of Jesus Christ, and given the nature and the necessity of the Catholic faith, it is always the clear duty of the Bishop to exclude from the dignity of teaching in the Church in any position under his control any individual who will teach or favor the contradiction of the divinely revealed message. Modernism was and is such a contradiction. Thus it was and always will necessarily remain the duty of the Bishop to see to it that any individual who teaches or who supports Modernism in any way be excluded from any co-operation in the apostolic task of teaching the divine message of Jesus Christ within His Church.

In issuing this decree, St. Pius X was taking cognizance of the basic truth about the teaching work in the Church which was afterwards brought out so clearly by Pope Pius XII in his allocution *Si diligis*. This document brings out more clearly than any other in recent years the tremendous responsibility of the Bishop in the field of teaching the divine message.

Christ Our Lord entrusted the truth which He had brought from heaven to the Apostles, and through them to their successors. He sent His Apostles as He had been sent by the Father (*John*, 20:21), to teach all nations everything they had heard from Him (cf. *Matt.*, 28:19 f.). The Apostles are, therefore, by divine right the true doctors and teachers in the Church. Besides the lawful successors of the Apostles, namely the Roman Pontiff for the universal Church and the Bishops for the faithful entrusted to their care (cf. can. 1326), there are no other teachers divinely constituted in the Church of Christ. But both the Bishops and, first of all, the Supreme Teacher and Vicar of Christ on earth, may associate others with themselves in their work as teacher, and may use their advice. They delegate to them the faculty to teach, either by special grant, or by conferring an office to which this faculty is attached (cf. can. 1328). Those who are so called teach, not in their own name, nor by reason of their theological knowledge, but by reason of the mandate they have received from the lawful Teaching Authority. Their faculty always remains subject to that Authority, nor is it ever exercised in its own right or independently. Bishops, for their part, by conferring this faculty, are not deprived of the right to teach. They retain the very grave obligation of supervising the doctrine which others propose, in order to help them and of seeing to its integrity and security. Therefore the legitimate Teaching Authority of the Church is guilty of no injury or no offence to any of those to whom it has given a canonical mission, if it desires to ascertain what they, to whom it has entrusted the mission of teaching, are proposing and defending in their lectures, in books, notes, and reviews intended for the use of their students, as well as in books and other publications intended for the general public.[12]

In the *Si diligis*, Pope Pius XII explains the directives issued by St. Pius X in the *Pascendi* and in the *Sacrorum antistitum*. The members of the apostolic hierarchy of jurisdiction, the Pope and the residential Bishops throughout the world are responsible before

[12] The text and translation of the *Si diligis* are in *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, CXXX, 2 (Aug., 1954), 127-37. This passage is found on pp. 133 f.

God Himself for the teaching in the Catholic Church. All the legitimate teaching in the Church is issued by them or under their direction. They have full responsibility and full competence to see to it that the faithful of Christ receive His message in all of its purity and integrity. Naturally if they themselves contradict, or transform, or withhold any portion of the revealed truth which has been entrusted to them, they will have been recreant to the commission they have received from Our Lord Himself. And, in precisely the same way, they are being disloyal to Our Lord if they allow those whom they use as helpers in the teaching work within the Church to deny or to adulterate any of the divinely revealed doctrines.

The power and the dignity of the apostolic Catholic hierarchy in the field of dogmatic teaching are beyond comparison. But with that dignity and with that authority goes the gravest responsibility which human beings are called upon to assume. The directives which, in the *Sacrorum antistitum,* form the immediate context of the command to take the Oath against Modernism, simply take cognizance of these basic and most important facts.

In the final analysis, they are founded upon an awareness of the tremendous and vital necessity of the divine faith itself. St. Pius X directed that all professors or directors of seminaries and of Catholic universities who taught or showed sympathy with the doctrines condemned as Modernism should be removed from their positions, and commanded that such individuals should not be brought into such positions in the future. This order, as is quite obvious, is simply a statement of what is actually required by the constitution of the Catholic Church itself. The same obligation would have been incumbent on the Bishops of the Catholic Church even if St. Pius X had not spoken out and issued these directives.

The *Sacrorum antistitum,* however, goes even further. It demands that the individual teachers in seminaries and in Catholic universities submit to their Bishops the name of the textbook they intend to follow or the list of theses they intend to teach and defend in their academic lectures. Furthermore it insists that the Bishops themselves take care, during the course of the academic year, to find out exactly what is being taught in the various classes in the Catholic institutes of higher learning under their direction. And then, in order to bring out this obligation for doctrinal

orthodoxy in the clearest possible way, the *Sacrorum antistitum* orders these teachers to make the Profession of Faith of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council, and to take and sign their names to the special Oath composed by St. Pius X precisely to repudiate and to condemn the central teachings of the Modernist movement.

With this salutary severity with reference to the teachers and directors of ecclesiastical seminaries and of Catholic universities, the *Sacrorum antistitum* likewise contains strict directives about the candidates for Holy Orders. Men who hold Modernistic teachings or who are sympathetic towards the Modernists are not to be ordained. With his intense awareness of the pastoral mission of the Catholic priesthood, St. Pius X was all too cognizant of the harm that could and inevitably would come to the Catholic Church from a priest who would be willing to pervert his position by working against the divinely revealed teaching of Jesus Christ.

THE OATH ITSELF

Against the background of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* then, the Oath against Modernism appears as something intended primarily for teachers in and directors of ecclesiastical seminaries and Catholic universities. Other dignitaries of the Catholic Church are ordered to take this Oath, along with the Tridentine Profession of the Faith. But it is something intended primarily and immediately for those who are called upon to teach or to direct candidates for Holy Orders.

Thus the Oath itself is constituted as a Profession of the Catholic belief. The man who takes this Oath makes his solemn declaration in the sight of God Himself that he firmly accepts and receives all the teachings and each individual one of the teachings "that have been defined, asserted, and declared by the infallible *magisterium* of the Church, especially those points of doctrine which are directly opposed to the errors of this time."[13] The most important and influential of these "errors of this time" are clearly pointed out in the formula, and the man who takes the Oath calls upon God as His Witness that he rejects these false judgments and firmly accepts the statements of Catholic doctrine opposed to them. St. Pius X ordered that the professors and administrators in seminaries

[13] *Denz.*, n. 2145.

and in Catholic universities sign their names to the formula of the Oath after they had taken it. Thus it would be difficult to find or even to conceive of a more effective measure for the protection of candidates for Holy Orders from the infection of Modernism than that constituted by St. Pius X in his legislation about the Oath in the *Sacrorum antistitum.* The man who taught or in any way aided in the dissemination or the protection of Modernistic teachings in a seminary or in a Catholic university after the issuance of the *Sacrorum antistitum* would mark himself, not only as a sinner against the Catholic faith, but also as a common perjuror.

Incidentally, the Oath against Modernism contained in the *Sacrorum antistitum* is something which demands a certain amount of knowledge in the man who takes it seriously and religiously. We must not allow ourselves to forget that essentially an oath is an act of religion, an act in which we worship almighty God or manifest our acknowledgement of His supreme excellence and of our own complete and absolute dependence upon Him.[14] Thus an oath is definitely not something that can be taken lightly. And the man who takes the Oath against Modernism calls upon God to witness that he reverently submits and whole-heartedly assents "to all the condemnations, the declarations, and the commands which are contained in the encyclical *Pascendi* and in the decree *Lamentabili,* especially to those that relate to what they call the history of dogmas."[15] It would seem to be irreverent indeed for any seminary or university professor to take this oath without knowing exactly what is condemned, what is taught, and what is commanded in these two tremendously important documents. It is quite obvious that some of the doctrines and directives contained in the *Pascendi* and in the *Lamentabili* are also brought out in the Oath against Modernism. But it is equally clear that not all of these teachings and precepts of the two 1907 documents are set forth in the Oath, and that the man who wishes to take the Oath as a religious act, to take it worthily, must exert himself to find out exactly and in detail what he is promising to accept and to believe. And it is patent that the man who does not take the time and the trouble to find out what is taught and what is commanded in the *Pascendi* and in the *Lamentabili* is being somewhat careless in calling upon the living

[14] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* IIa-IIae, q. 89, a. 4.
[15] *Denz.,* n. 2146.

God to witness that he will whole-heartedly abide by the doctrines and the directives contained in these two statements.

RECAPITULATION

The Oath against Modernism is undoubtedly, up until now, the most important and the most influential document issued by the Holy See during the course of the twentieth century. It is a magnificent statement of Catholic truth, in the face of the errors which were being disseminated within the Church by the cleverest enemies the Mystical Body of Christ has encountered in the course of its history. It was a profession of Catholic belief intended primarily for those engaged in the spiritual and intellectual formation of candidates for Holy Orders. According to the strict command of the *Sacrorum antistitum,* the men for whom the Oath against Modernism was primarily intended were also obliged to show their Bishops, at the beginning of each academic year, the textbooks they were employing in class, and the theses they intended to teach and to defend. The Bishops themselves were not only reminded of their obligation, but were strictly commanded to watch over the teaching being given in the institutions of higher learning under their direction and control.

The Bishops were also commanded to see to it that no man tainted with Modernism, either as a teacher of the errors condemned in the *Lamentabili* and the *Pascendi,* or as one who supported these errors by working to discredit the teachers of Catholic truth who opposed and unmasked Modernism, was to be admitted to or permitted to remain in the professorial corps or the administration of an ecclesiastical seminary or a Catholic university. And no young man who was infected by Modernism errors was to be allowed to become or to remain a candidate for Holy Orders.

This was the rigorous and powerful direction of the *Sacrorum antistitum.* Quite obviously it was not and it still is not in accord with the tastes of liberal Catholics. But it was and it remains the great expression of St. Pius X's desire to accomplish his mission as Christ's Vicar on earth. It was and it remains a tremendously effective factor for the protection of the little ones of Jesus Christ against the virus of Modernism.

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