

**MEDIEVALISM: A
REPLY TO
CARDINAL MERCIER**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649184996

Medievalism: a reply to Cardinal Mercier by George Tyrrell

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GEORGE TYRRELL

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MEDIEVALISM

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THE LENTEN PASTORAL

DÉSIRÉ JOSEPH MERCIER, CARDINAL PRIEST OF
THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH; *by the Grace of God*
and of the Apostolic See ARCHBISHOP OF MALINES,
PRIMATE OF BELGIUM; *to the Clergy and Faithful of*
our Diocese, health and benediction in our Lord Jesus
Christ.

MOST DEAR BRETHREN,

On the 3rd of July, 1907, the Holy Father caused to be drawn up a catalogue of errors which he condemned, and which later were grouped together under the name of *Modernism*. On the 8th of the following September, in order to explain the reasons underlying this condemnation of Modernism, he gave to the world an Encyclical remarkable for its fulness, clearness and vigour. Thank God, these errors, which have principally taken root in France and Italy, find scarce an adherent in Belgium. Your preservation from them is due to the watchfulness of your Pastors, and to the spirit of scientific impartiality and Christian obedience that animates the representatives of higher education in this country of ours.

Nevertheless, My Brethren, I regard it as a duty of my pastoral charge to acquaint you in some measure with this papal Encyclical which will be hereafter known to ecclesiastical history by its opening words:

Pascendi Dominici Gregis, or more simply by its first word *Pascendi*.

Since the Holy Father addresses his letter to all the particular churches; that is, to the bishops, priests, and laity of the Catholic world; he plainly intends that each one should draw profit from it. Moreover, the document is of such importance, and has already attained such historical value, that any one who is interested in the life of the Church should be acquainted with, at least, the substance of its contents.

Finally, My Brethren, as soon as the Pope had spoken—nay, before he had spoken, and as soon as the telegrams announced his utterance as imminent,—the infidel press set about misrepresenting it. Neither journals nor reviews of the anti-clerical party in this country were honest enough to publish the text, or even the general tenor of the Encyclical; but with an eagerness and unanimity, explicable only by party prejudice, they quibbled with the word *Modernism*, and tried to make their credulous readers believe that the Pope had condemned modern thought, which, in their vague language, means modern science and its methods.

This impression, so unjust to the Pope and to those who obey him, has perhaps in all good faith been shared by some of you; in which case we would now undeceive you.

We propose therefore, My Brethren, to speak to you about *Modernism* in order to make you comprehend the motives that have led to its condemnation by the supreme authority of the Church.

What then is Modernism? or rather, since we are not going into details that would interest but few of you, what is the parent-idea or soul of Modernism?

Modernism is not the modern form of science, and therefore the condemnation of Modernism is neither the condemnation of that science of which we are justly so proud, nor the repudiation of its methods which Catholic scientists rightly regard it an honour to put in practice and to teach.

Modernism consists essentially in maintaining that the devout soul should draw the object and motive of its faith from itself and itself alone. It rejects every sort of revealed communication that is imposed on the conscience from outside; and thus, by a necessary consequence, it becomes the denial of the doctrinal authority of the Church established by Jesus Christ, the contempt of the hierarchy divinely appointed to rule the Christian community.

Christ did not come before us as the inventor of a new philosophy, uncertain of himself, committing a body of reformable opinions to the free discussion of his followers. In the strength of his divine wisdom and sovereign power he not only presented to, but imposed upon, men the revealed word which showed them eternal life and the only way to attain it. He proclaimed a moral code for them and gave them the helps necessary to put its prescriptions in practice. Grace, and those sacraments which give it to us, or which restore it to us when, having lost it, we wish to recover it by repentance, constitute the sum-total of these helps—the means of salvation.

He has instituted a Church. As he could be with us only a few years, before leaving us he conferred his powers upon his Apostles to be transmitted to their successors, the Pope and the bishops. The episcopate, in union with the Sovereign Pontiff, has thus received and alone possesses the commission to make known officially and to interpret the doctrines revealed by Christ; it and it alone has the right to condemn with authority all errors inconsistent with those doctrines.

The Christian is one who trusts the teaching of the Church and accepts sincerely the doctrines she proposes for his belief. He who repudiates or questions her authority, and by consequence rejects one or more of the truths she compels him to believe, cuts himself off from the ecclesiastical community.

The excommunication pronounced by the Pope against obstinate Modernists, and which our enemies represent as an act of despotism, is the most simple and natural thing in the world.

My Brethren, we have here merely a question of honesty. Yes or No? Do you believe in the divine authority of the Church? Do you accept exteriorly and interiorly what, in the name of Jesus Christ, she proposes to your belief? Yes or No? Will you consent to obey her?

If yes, then she puts the sacraments at your disposal and undertakes your safe conduct to Heaven.

If no, you deliberately break the bond that united you to her, of which she had tied and blessed the