

The Heresy Series - Modernism

"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths"

(2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Modernism directly attacks all the articles of the Creed and causes believers to give up their faith entirely and it is why we are seeing so many people leave the Church. If the heresy of modernism is not defeated by a faithful teaching of the divine Deposit in the same simple and humble meaning which it had for the Apostles, the Church, humanly speaking, cannot survive. And Why? She would lose her Apostolicity, on which her oneness, holiness, and Catholicity depend.

Council of Nicaea (325 AD):

The initial version of the Nicene Creed was created in response to Arianism, which was gaining traction within the Christian community. Arianism claimed that Jesus was not fully divine but a created being. The creed affirmed the divinity of Jesus, stating that he is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father".

Council of Constantinople (381 AD):

This council further clarified the creed, particularly regarding the Holy Spirit, affirming that the Holy Spirit is also divine and equal to the Father and the Son. This revised creed is the one most commonly used today and is often referred to as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed or simply the Nicene Creed.

Opening Prayer: The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

What is heresy?

The exact word heresy doesn't appear in the bible. Instead, the concept and the Greek root word *hairesis* (meaning sect, faction, or choice) are used in the following passages:

1 Corinthians 11:19, Galatians 5:20, and 2 Peter 2:1

St. Thomas Aquinas defined heresy in his *Summa Theologiae* as "a species of infidelity in men who, having professed the faith of Christ (a baptized person), corrupt its dogmas." He viewed it as a willful choice to reject or alter specific core teachings of the Church, rather than a total rejection of the faith.

Aquinas outlined three strict criteria for an opinion to be considered heresy:

Prior Profession: The person must have previously been baptized and professed the Christian faith.

Corruption of Dogma: The rejected or altered belief must be a formally defined dogma (a truth revealed by God) rather than a simple custom or open theological debate.

Obstinacy: The heretic "chooses" which parts of the faith to believe, stubbornly clinging to their own unauthorized ideas against the official teachings of the Church.

Found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2089)

Why study heresy? - know they Enemy

1 Peter 5:8 - "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"

In the study of heresy, we come to know they enemy (Satan) and the tactics he uses to attack his target. He ultimately attacks Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity.

Why does he attack Jesus? Jesus is The Way to eternal life. He is the door to Heaven.

Our enemy is smart. In most cases he knows he can't directly attack Jesus, so he attacks strategically. He attacks aspects of the truth in order to make his attacks seem less obvious, similar to how he attacked Adam and Eve in the garden. He tries to get us to question or doubt the truth of God. Let's not fall in the trap, in doing so he is hoping we will believe in a lie.

St. Robert Bellarmine sees heresy as the greatest evil for souls, for it turns them away from the priceless gift of the original Faith in its purity and integrity, the foundation of the spiritual life as such. "What the plague is to the body," he writes, "is exactly what heresy is in souls." He states that heresy is the work of Satan.

Modernism Heresy

Pope Gregory the 16th defined it on **Sept. 26th, 1825** *Dum acerbissimas*. The document condemns the errors of Father George Hermes and certain other priest, professors in German universities, who were using the Modern Philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel.

Some trace the seeds of Modernism to the Enlightenment period, also known as the Age of Reason. It emphasized reason, science, and individual liberty as the primary means for understanding the world and improving the human condition as opposed to tradition, superstition, and absolute authority. Others point to

the Protestant Reformation as a catalyst, as it led to new interpretations of scripture and challenged papal authority.

Pope Leo XIII (1810 – July 20, 1903) was the head of the Catholic Church from 1878 until his death in 1903. He is known for his efforts to reconcile Catholic teachings with modern ideas and for his intellectual contributions. The pontificate of Leo XIII (r. 1878–1903) was decisive in shaping the Catholic response to modernity. His primary aim was to guide the Church in coming to terms with the modern world by making a clear distinction between unchangeable truths and other teachings that could be legitimately adapted to fit the scientific, democratic, and industrial world.

Pope Pius X (1835-1914), now Saint Pope Pius X, condemned Modernism in his **1907** encyclical [*Pascendi Dominici Gregis*](#), stating that “Not only is it a heresy, it is the **synthesis of all heresies**,” and it leads to the destruction not of the Catholic religion alone but all religion.” The reason for its destructive power is that it attacks not particular truths, but rather the nature of truth itself. It is the greatest of the heresies so far, the most complete and most devastating.

St. Pius X thought that it may well be the final stage of the Great Apostasy foreseen by St. Paul (see 2 Thess. 2, 1-12).

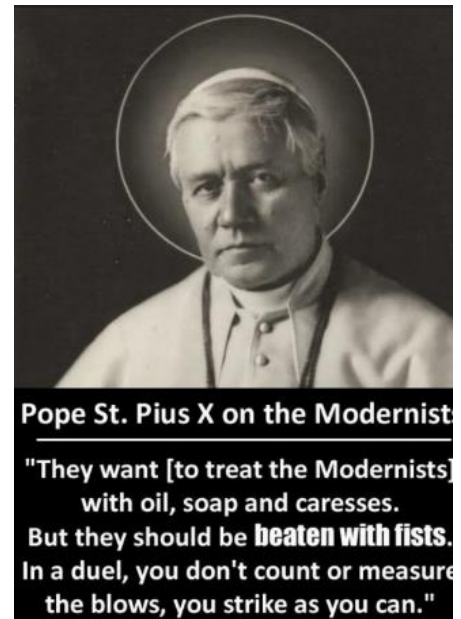
In essence, it is the worst heresy, because it brings together all the different heresies of the past and puts them together. He states that all the sap and vigor that’s found in all the other heresies is found concentrated in Modernism.

Pius X describes Modernism not as a single error but as a collection of ideas that undermine the foundations of the Catholic faith. He argues that Modernists:

- Treat religious truth as evolving rather than unchanging.
- Believe religious beliefs arise from personal religious experience rather than objective divine revelation.
- View Church doctrines as historical developments that can change substantially over time.
- Apply historical criticism to Scripture and Church history in ways that question traditional teachings.

The Modernist's Way of Thinking: The encyclical analyzes Modernists in several roles:

- **As philosophers:** They begin with agnosticism, claiming reason cannot know God directly.
- **As believers:** Faith is rooted in subjective religious experience or inner feeling.
- **As theologians:** Doctrine develops from believers' experiences and adapts over time.
- **As historians and biblical scholars:** Scripture and Church history are interpreted primarily through historical-critical methods, often leading to skepticism about miracles and supernatural events.



- **As reformers:** They advocate changes to theology, biblical interpretation, Church governance, and discipline to better fit modern culture.

Pius X argues that, taken together, these approaches erode confidence in revealed truth.

When this philosophical error is applied to religion, the results is that Catholicism and its unique deposit of divinely revealed truths, becomes merely one expression of the “religious sentiment” of believers who adhere to a particular tradition as a matter of cultural heritage or personal preference. And since cultures and preferences evolve over time, so should religious dogma.

The Modernism heresy has the tendency to return over and over again because of original sin and our pride. The idea of things being immutably true and the church having a certain authority and teaching is difficult for people with original sin to uphold.

Defense of Catholic Teaching

The encyclical reaffirms several traditional Catholic principles:

- God can be known through reason as well as revelation.
- Revelation comes objectively from God, not merely from human religious consciousness.
- Dogmas express permanent truths, although the Church's understanding of them can deepen without changing their essential meaning.
- The Church's teaching authority (the Magisterium) has the responsibility to authentically interpret revelation.

Measures Ordered by the Pope

- Pius X instructed bishops to take concrete steps against Modernism, including:
- Closely supervise seminaries and theological education.
- Review books and publications for doctrinal errors.
- Remove teachers who promote Modernist ideas.
- Establish diocesan vigilance committees to monitor the spread of Modernism.
- Ensure clergy receive sound philosophical and theological formation.

These measures were part of a broader anti-Modernist campaign that later included the *Oath Against Modernism (1910)*, which many clergy and theology professors were required to take

What is True about Modernism?

God does dwell within Man.

There are Prudential Judgments and Church disciplines that can be changed. Over time, Church teaching can be more clearly defined to provide more clarity, but it cannot be revised.

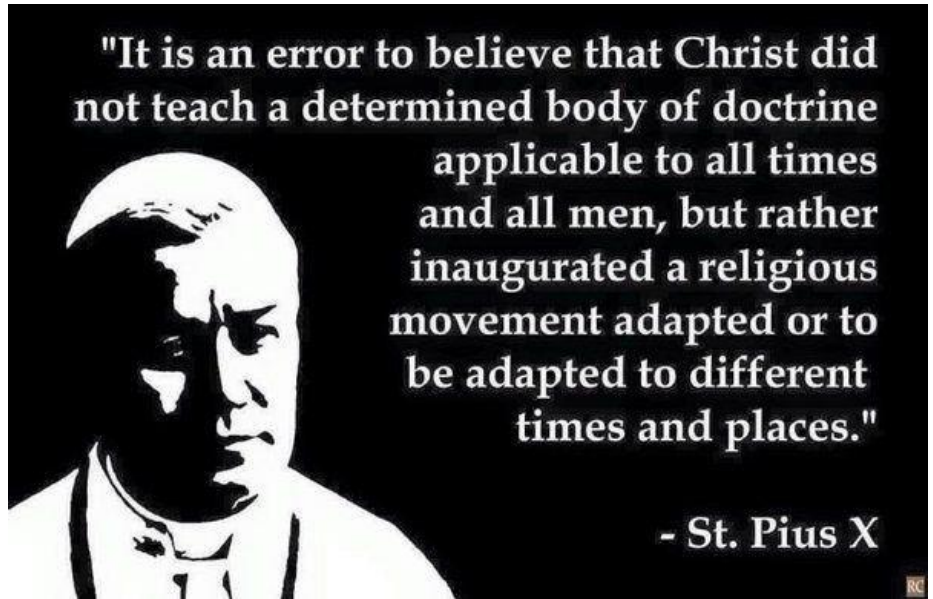
“Thanks to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the understanding of both the realities and the words of the heritage of faith is able to grow in the life of the Church: through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts”; it is in particular “theological research which deepens knowledge of revealed truth.” CCC-94

What is false about Modernism?

- It is false to believe that reality is dependent on individual perception and experience.
A Dogma of the Catholic Faith is that God is Eternal (Everlasting).

St. Irenaeus

For even creation reveals Him who formed it, and the very work made suggests Him who made it, and the world manifests Him who ordered it. The Universal [Catholic] Church, moreover, through the whole world, has received this tradition from the Apostles (Against Heresies 2:9 [A.D. 189]).

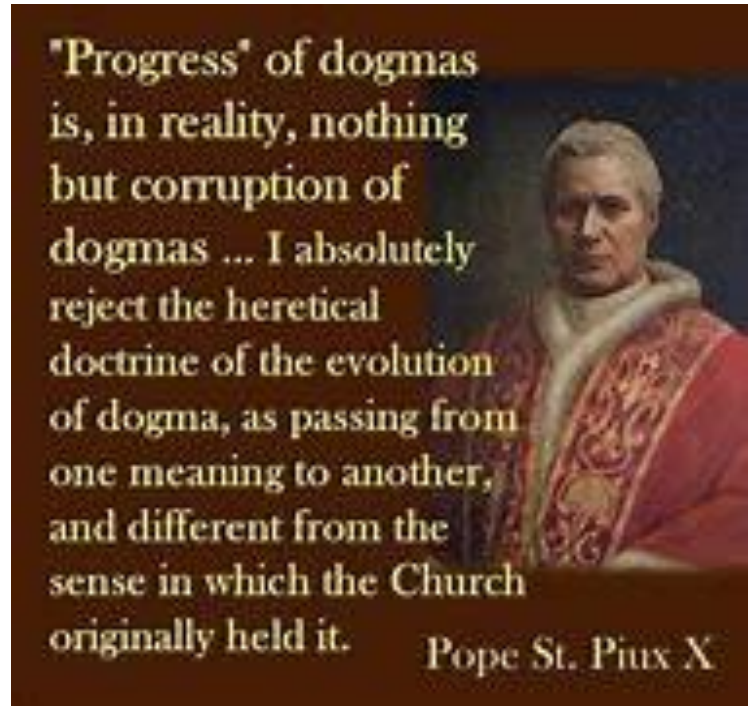


- It is false to believe that there may not be a single, universal truth. There is only one God and he is Truth itself.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." Deuteronomy 6:4

Jesus said "I am the way, and the **truth**, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." John 14:6

- It is false to believe that Sacred Tradition, including church Dogma and definitive doctrine established by the Church Magisterium can change and therefore are not enduring.
 - A Dogma of the Catholic Faith states that God is Immutable (Unchanging) and Eternal (Everlasting).
 - Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Revelation 22:13
 - "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." Matthew 24:35
 - "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." Malachi 3:6.
 - "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." – Hebrews 13:8



Sacred Tradition is the living transmission of Christ's teaching (The Word of God/Jesus) entrusted to the Apostles and perpetuated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Sacred tradition serves as a guiding light that leads us to God's unchanging truth.

- "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." 2 Thessalonians 2:15
- "Now we commend you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not accord with the tradition that you received from us." 2 Thessalonians 3:6
- "Follow the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which is in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us." 2 Timothy 1:13 -14
- It is false to believe that divinity can only be experienced within Man. This denies God's transcendence, it denies his miraculous power, and the human ability to know God through creation.
 - "The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? Psalm 113:4-6
 - "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built." 1 Kings 8:27

Examples of God's Miraculous Power: Creation, Parting of the Red Sea, Manna in the Wilderness, Raising the Dead, Controlling the weather, Healing the Sick, Casting out Demons, The Eucharist.

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened." Romans 1:19-21

The heritage of faith entrusted to the whole of the Church – CC84

The apostles entrusted the "Sacred deposit" of the faith, contained in Sacred Scripture **and Tradition**, to the whole of the Church. "By **adhering to this heritage** the entire holy people, united to its pastors, remains always faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. So, in maintaining, practicing, and professing the faith that has been handed on, there should be a remarkable harmony between the bishops and the faithful.

The Magisterium of the Church – CC85, 86, 88, 89

"The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church **alone**. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. "Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but its servant. It teaches **only what has been handed on** to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, **guards it with dedication**, and **expounds it faithfully**. All that is proposed for belief as being **divinely revealed** is drawn from this single deposit of faith." The Church's

Magisterium exercises the authority it holds from Christ to the fullest extent when it defines **dogmas**, that is, when it proposes, in a form obliging the Christian people to an **irrevocable adherence** of faith, truths, contained in divine Revelation or also when it proposes, in a definitive way, truths having a necessary connection with these. Dogmas are lights along the path of faith; they illuminate it and make it secure. Conversely, **if our life is upright**, our intellect and heart will be open to welcome the light shed by the dogmas of faith.”

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Matthew 28:16-20

“O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. Grace be with you.” 1 Tim 6:20-21

The Church response to Modernism

The First Vatican Council or Vatican 1 (1868-1870) The council's main purpose was to clarify Catholic doctrine in response to the rising influence of the modern philosophical trends of the 19th century. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith (Dei Filius), the council condemned what it considered the errors of rationalism, anarchism, communism, socialism, liberalism, modernism, naturalism, pantheism, and secularism. Its other concern was the doctrine of the primacy (supremacy) and infallibility of the Pope, which it defined in the First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ (Pastor aeternus).

The solemn definition of Vatican I is perfectly clear: “The teaching of Faith, which God has revealed, has not been proposed as a philosophical discovery to be perfected by human ingenuity, but as a divine deposit handed over to the Spouse of Christ (the Church) to be guarded faithfully and to be explained infallibly. Hence that meaning of sacred dogmas must perpetually be retained which the Holy Mother Church has once declared; nor is that meaning ever to be abandoned under the pretext and name of a more profound comprehension.” The Canon follows: “if anyone should say that with the progress of knowledge it is sometimes possible that dogmas proposed by the Church can be given a meaning different from the one that the Church has understood and still understands, let him be anathema (excommunicated).

The Second Vatican Council or Vatican II (1962-1965)

In the decades following St. Pius X, it seemed that this Heresy had come to an end, however it had only gone underground. The important Encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (“The Human Race” -1950) shows that the Church was aware of its continuing existence. But in the aftermath of Vatican 2 it came up from underground into full visibility in the Church, causing an unprecedented chaos in doctrine and catechetics. Its nature has not changed, and it continues to cause the suppression of the Deposit of Faith and Morals and the official catechism which teach it. The Holy See early in this crisis of Faith declared a world-wide Year of Faith to review the prayerful profession of the Apostles’ Creed everywhere in the Church.

Pope Paul the VI wrote “While man’s religious sense today is in a decline. New opinions in exegesis and theology, often borrowed from bold but blind secular philosophies, have in places found a way into the realm of Catholic teaching. They question or distort the objective sense of the truths taught with authority by the Church. They spread about the illusion of giving Christianity a new interpretation.” This is the heart of the Heresy of Modernism, operating now in the years after Vatican II, under the name “The New Hermeneutic”. Charles Journet, one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century, stated this essential nature and tactical procedure of Modernism succinctly. “The Christian terms and maintained,” he writes, “but only to be reinterpreted. The words creation, incarnation, redemption, real presence, transubstantiation, and so on, take on new meanings.

Takeaway – All Catholic laity should know and read the Bible, Catechism, and Creed. Be familiar with the teachings of the Apostles and early Church Fathers and understand the meaning of the words. We need to continue to help Catholics know and believe in the real presence of the Eucharist.

Note: The Eucharistic Real Presence, the center and heart of the divine Deposit of Faith and Morals, is simply absent from the writings of the Modernists, because they have suffered from a loss of faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Modernists use the terms “liberals” or “fundamentalists” to describe Catholics, and the use of these terms should be rejected by Catholics because they are designed to suppress the Deposit of Faith.

Closing Prayer – Holy Michael Prayer

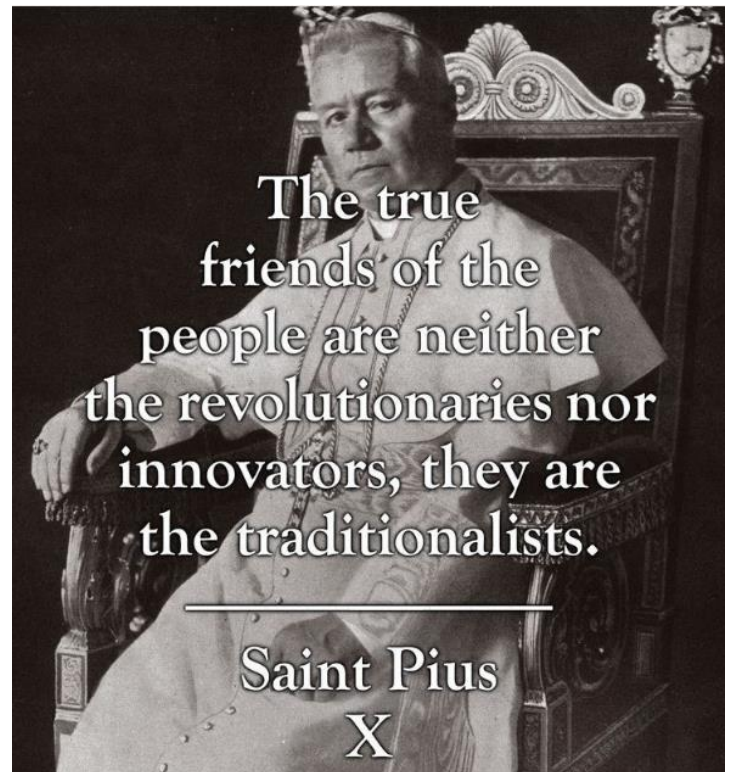
Resources

The Deposit of Faith: What the Catholic Church *Really* Believes by Eugene Kevane, Ph.D.

Key figures of Modernism, which emerged from Enlightenment ideas

Rene Descartes (1596-1650) French philosopher and mathematician who is often credited with being the father of modern philosophy for his emphasis on reason and his development of rationalism. He is famous for his philosophical statement, “I think, therefore I am. He was not a direct participant in the Enlightenment, but is considered a crucial precursor to it. His emphasis on reason as a path to knowledge and his method of systematic doubt laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment's focus on reason and individual thought.

Baruch or Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) Dutch philosopher of Portuguese-Jewish origin. Widely considered a key figure in the development of modern thought and a foundational influence on modernism. His philosophy, particularly his concept of substance monism and his emphasis on reason and individual liberty, challenged



traditional religious and metaphysical frameworks and paved the way for secular and individualistic perspectives that are central to modernism.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) Genevan philosopher who influenced the progress of the Age of Enlightenment throughout Europe, as well as aspects of the French Revolution (1789-1799). According to Rousseau all corruption in society is a result not of man's sinfulness but of society. He rejected the Christian notion of original sin and proposes that it is society and its power dynamics that is instead the corrupting influence on the natural goodness of man. The insights of Rousseau were expressed in the French Revolution which claimed the banner of *liberty, equality and fraternity*. It was the expression of the enlightenments critique of tradition and authority of the church and political regime, and it led to the reign of terror making it legitimate to kill members of the church, ruling regime, and any opponent. 16,000 people were sentenced by the Revolutionary Tribunal and executed. During the revolution any symbols of Christianity were replaced with symbols of reason. Cathedral of Notre Dame was turned into a temple of reason and images of the saints were replaced with busts of modern philosophers. Formal religion was not tolerated.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) protestant German philosopher who rejected the idea that you can come to know God by reason. That you can only know God through experience, by faith alone. Religious truth became to be known as a private expression of the individuals experience. He can be said to be the father of subjectivism.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) German idealist who can be said to be the Father of Historicism. History is nothing less than the gradual development of God. The idea that the truth about a claim is determined by its historical setting and that a truth at one time would be false at another time. So, truth evolves through history and so what is true at a particular moment becomes a stepping stone for further development.

Alfred Loisy 1857-1940 a French Catholic Priest and was formally excommunicated in 1908. He taught "Truth is not any more immutable than man himself, for it evolves with him, in him and by him." and he stated "Christ did not teach a definite body of truth applicable to men of all times and places. Rather he launched a kind of religious movement adapted or to be adapted to various times and places." And again: "The chief Articles of the Apostles' Creed did not have the same meaning for the early Christians as they have for the Christians of our time." He suppressed the Apostles Creed from the catechism.

George Tyrrel 1861 – 1909 was an Anglo-Irish Catholic priest. A convert from Anglicanism, joined the Jesuit order in 1880. He was expelled from the Jesuit Order in 1906 and excommunicated in 1908. They questioned traditional interpretations of scripture, dogma, and Church authority and emphasized personal religious experience and sought to reconcile faith with modern thought.

The Oath Against Modernism: Pope Pius X - 1910

To be sworn to by all clergy, pastors, confessors, preachers, religious superiors, and professors in philosophical-theological seminaries.

I, _____, firmly embrace and accept each and every definition that has been set forth and declared by the unerring teaching authority of the Church, especially those principal truths which are directly opposed to the errors of this day. And first of all, I profess that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from the created world (see Rom. 1:19), that is, from the visible works of creation, as a cause from its effects, and that, therefore, his existence can also be demonstrated:

Secondly, I accept and acknowledge the external proofs of revelation, that is, divine acts and especially miracles and prophecies as the surest signs of the divine origin of the Christian religion and I hold that these same proofs are well adapted to the understanding of all eras and all men, even of this time. Thirdly, I believe with equally firm faith that the Church, the guardian and teacher of the revealed word, was personally instituted by the real and historical Christ when he lived among us, and that the Church was built upon Peter, the prince of the apostolic hierarchy, and his successors for the duration of time. Fourthly, I sincerely hold that the doctrine of faith was handed down to us from the apostles through the orthodox Fathers in exactly the same meaning and always in the same purport. Therefore, I entirely reject the heretical' misrepresentation that dogmas evolve and change from one meaning to another different from the one which the Church held previously. I also condemn every error according to which, in place of the divine deposit which has been given to the spouse of Christ to be carefully guarded by her, there is put a philosophical figment or product of a human conscience that has gradually been developed by human effort and will continue to develop indefinitely. Fifthly, I hold with certainty and sincerely confess that faith is not a blind sentiment of religion welling up from the depths of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the motion of a will trained to morality; but faith is a genuine assent of the intellect to truth received by hearing from an external source. By this assent, because of the authority of the supremely truthful God, we believe to be true that which has been revealed and attested to by a personal God, our creator and lord.

Furthermore, with due reverence, I submit and adhere with my whole heart to the condemnations, declarations, and all the prescripts contained in the encyclical *Pascendi* and in the decree *Lamentabili*, especially those concerning what is known as the history of dogmas. I also reject the error of those who say that the faith held by the Church can contradict history, and that Catholic dogmas, in the sense in which they are now understood, are irreconcilable with a more realistic view of the origins of the Christian religion. I also condemn and reject the opinion of those who say that a well-educated Christian assumes a dual personality-that of a believer and at the same time of a historian, as if it were permissible for a historian to hold things that contradict the faith of the believer, or to establish premises which, provided there be no direct denial of dogmas, would lead to the conclusion that dogmas are either false or doubtful. Likewise, I reject that method of judging and interpreting Sacred Scripture which, departing from the tradition of the Church, the analogy of faith, and the norms of the Apostolic See, embraces the misrepresentations of the rationalists and with no prudence or restraint adopts textual criticism as the one and supreme norm. Furthermore, I reject the opinion of those who hold that a professor lecturing or writing on a historico-theological subject should first put aside any preconceived opinion about the supernatural origin of Catholic tradition or about the divine promise of help to preserve all revealed truth forever; and that they should then interpret the writings of each of the Fathers solely by scientific principles, excluding all sacred authority, and with the same liberty of judgment that is common in the investigation of all ordinary historical documents.

Finally, I declare that I am completely opposed to the error of the modernists who hold that there is nothing divine in sacred tradition; or what is far worse, say that there is, but in a pantheistic sense, with the result that there would remain nothing but this plain simple fact-one to be put on a par with the ordinary facts of history-the fact, namely, that a group of men by their own labor, skill, and talent have continued through subsequent ages a school begun by Christ and his apostles. I firmly hold, then, and shall hold to my dying breath the belief of the Fathers in the charism of truth, which certainly is, was, and always will be in the succession of the

episcopacy from the apostles. The purpose of this is, then, not that dogma may be tailored according to what seems better and more suited to the culture of each age; rather, that the absolute and immutable truth preached by the apostles from the beginning may never be believed to be different, may never be understood in any other way.

I promise that I shall keep all these articles faithfully, entirely, and sincerely, and guard them inviolate, in no way deviating from them in teaching or in any way in word or in writing. Thus I promise, this I swear, so help me God.