Sacrorum Antistitum – Pope St. Pius X
SEPTEMBER 1, 1910 - “THE OATH AGAINST MODERNISM”

Pope Gregory XVI condemned the initial proposition of the Modernists in Mirari Vos (1832). Yet the movement of Liberal Catholicism continued to gather strength. Pius IX and Leo XIII both continued to fight this pernicious heresy. In particular, Leo XIII attacked modernist scriptural methods in Providentissimus Deus (1893) and the growing heresy of ‘Americanism’ in Testem Benevolentæ Nostræ (1899). Unfortunately, Leo XIII failed to provide sufficient ‘force’ (specific guidelines and concrete measures against disobedience) to root out the heresy. Pope St. Pius X therefore intensified the Church’s counterattack by issuing Lamentabili Sane (1907) and Pascendi Dominici Gregis (1907), utterly unmasking the modernist heresy. Despite such a crushing blow, this ‘hydra-heresy’ continued to grow and spread under the cover of greater secrecy.

Therefore, St. Pius X promulgated the motu proprio (papal document with greatest authority) called Sacrorum Antistitum (1910). He reiterated numerous legislative and disciplinary measures issued in Pascendi and decreed that all bishops, priests, and seminary professors would have to take a sacred oath repudiating modernism. He strenuously warned bishops to remain vigilant against this synthesis of all heresies; reminding them that no amount of watchfulness, vigor or severity can be sufficient. Pius X did much to combat modernism within the Church, but he knew that, like a serpent hiding beneath a rock, it could resurface and devastate the Church in a renewed attack.

EIGHT FOUNDATIONAL PROPOSITIONS OF MODERNISM

1) Religious Indifferentism (all religions are equal or ‘good enough’ for salvation)
2) False Human Freedom (French Revolution’s liberty, equality, & fraternity)
3) Separation of Church and State (an absolute separation is the ideal)
4) Minimism (there is a hierarchy of dogma and a believer must only accept the most important and/or that which is definitively taught as infallible)
5) Doctrinal Subjectivism (less emphasis on objective truth in faith and morals; instead the subjective interpretations and applications are what really matter)
6) Evolution of Dogma (there is some change in the objective meaning of the Church’s message over the course of centuries)
7) Denial of the Supernatural (especially Divine Revelation and miracles)
8) ‘Modernization’ of the Faith (the Faith must be updated, and corrected, by critically evaluating it in the light of new advances in the fields of human knowledge [e.g. history, literature, science, psychology, philosophy, etc.] so that it will be acceptable to modern society)

Find it online at http://www.catholicapologetics.info/modernproblems/modernism/bgrdoath.htm
SIX ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES DENIED BY MODERNISM

In *Partisans of Error*, Michael Davies points out that modernism erodes the Faith in:

1) **The Authority of Scripture and Tradition**
2) **The Divinity of Christ**
3) **Christ’s Universal Knowledge**
4) **Redemption through Christ’s Death on the Cross**
5) **The Holy Eucharist**
6) **The Divine Institution of the Papacy and the Episcopacy**

The entire text of Pope St. Pius X’s *motu proprio* is not readily available. I strongly recommend an article published in October of 1960 by Msgr. Joseph Fenton (editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*) for greater background and context. Msgr. Fenton includes English translations of the motu proprio’s introduction and conclusion.

**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 defense 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*.”

**NOTES & COMMENTS**

1) As pope, with the most sacred obligation to guard the full integrity and purity of the divinely revealed message, Pius X knew he it was his most solemn duty to issue these documents.
2) At this time, the integrity of the Catholic Faith itself was being threatened by an obdurate group of men whose heresies had already been unmasked and condemned.
3) Pius X speaks out very clearly against the existence of a secret alliance.
4) The most dangerous supporters of the modernist movement were priests active within the Catholic Church.
5) It is those within the Church (or nearest to her) that can cause the greatest harm to the Church, e.g. a priest in ‘good standing.’
6) Bishops are bound in conscience and by the obligations of their office to act energetically against this false teaching.

CONCLUSION

“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.”

NOTES & COMMENTS

1) The modernists and their sympathizers are working in unison with the most bitter enemies of the Catholic Church for the destruction of the Catholic Faith.
2) They work to transform the Catholic Church into an essentially non-doctrinal religious body. They seek a declaration by the Magisterium that doctrinal formulas do not carry the same meaning as they had previously.
3) They advocate the fantastically erroneous assumption that the supernatural communication of the Triune God could and should be brought up to date and thus given a certain respectability before modern society.
4) Ultimately they reject Catholic dogma as a genuine supernatural message or communication from the living God Himself.

THE SEVERITY OF THE DIRECTIVES

“But in order to do away with all suspicion that Modernism may secretly enter into the seminaries ... 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.”

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 Decree of Jan. 20, 1877.

“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 modeled 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 ... 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.”

The directives issued by St. Pius X reiterated the practical measures enumerated in Pascendi.

All these directives went against the liberal Catholic spirit. All of them were likewise unpopular and duly denounced. Many Catholics boasted in their being disloyal to the Church.

An oath is a sacred act of religion. Violating an oath is perjury and a grave sin against the Second Commandment.
THE OATH

(1) I firmly embrace and accept each and every definition declared by the Church, especially those opposed to the errors of this day.

(2) God exists and this can be known by human reason.

(3) Miracles and prophecy are the surest proofs of the divine foundation of the Christian religion and are well adapted to men of all eras.

(4) The Church was personally instituted by the real and historic Christ and built upon Peter and the apostolic hierarchy for the duration of time.

(5) The Deposit of Faith has been handed down in exactly the same meaning and purport. I deny the 'evolution' of dogma.

(6) The Deposit of Faith, in its entirety, is divinely given to us and none of it is the product of a human conscious or human effort.

(7) Faith is a genuine assent of the intellect to truth received by hearing from an external source (not feelings, not from within, not primarily about morality).

(8) I accept everything in Lamentabili and Pascendi.

(9) I reject the error that the Catholic Faith contradicts human history; that dogma may be irreconcilable with a more realistic view of the origins of Christianity.

(10) I reject the notion that a well-educated Christian may assume dual personalities.

(11) I reject the rationalist and critical method of judging and interpreting Sacred Scripture; it must be interpreted in light of tradition, the analogy of faith, and norms of the Apostolic See.

(12) I reject the idea that professors should put aside their Catholicism (faith in the supernatural, obedience to authority) and then evaluate any Christian writing by 'scientific' principles.

(13) I reject the error of Modernism (there is nothing divine or sacred in Tradition; all of Christianity's roots are explained by human causes alone).

(14) I firmly believe in the charism of truth. (It remains in the succession of the episcopacy from the Apostles. Dogma does not change from the immutable truth. It can never have a different meaning or be understood differently by subsequent ages. I will hold this until I die.)

Thus I promise, thus I swear, so help me God.

Epilogue: In July of 1967, two years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI had the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) abolish the Oath Against Modernism.