

An Overview of Modernism

By Michael Lofton. [source](#)

Have you ever encountered someone in the Church who said it doesn't matter what religion you believe, or that truth is subjective? If so, you have probably encountered a Modernist.

What Is Modernism?

By its very nature, Modernism — the synthesis of all heresies, according to Pope St. Pius X — is hard to define because it doesn't have an official creed. For this reason, it is like nailing jelly to a wall. There are some basic components to Modernism, however, some of which are as follows:

1. **All religions are equal.** For the Modernist, it doesn't matter if you are a Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Wiccan or snake handler; all that matters is that one is religious in some way, since all religious paths lead to God. Clearly, this is at odds with Jesus Christ, Who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). It is also at odds with what the Catholic Church teaches in the Catechism: "Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it" (846).
2. **Religion is not about dogma but about sentimentality and feelings.** For the Modernist, religion is essentially about what makes you feel good; if Christianity, or any other religion, is what makes you feel good and more in touch with the Divine, then it is true for you. In other words, religion does not consist of creeds or objective truth but of

feelings. As we saw in John 14:6, quoted above, truth isn't subjective but is found only in Jesus and His Church.

3. **The historical Jesus is not necessarily the Jesus of the Gospels.** This means the Scriptures are not necessarily reliable from an historical perspective, according to the Modernist. For example, the Modernist would say that Jesus may not have truly risen from the dead. According to this view, the Resurrection mentioned in Scripture was essentially the way the Apostles chose to communicate the belief that Jesus continues to live in our hearts after His crucifixion. This is completely at odds with St. Paul, who said, "And if Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain, for you are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).
4. **Doctrine evolves.** The Modernist says that in previous centuries, the dogmas of the Faith, such as the dogmas of the Trinity, were true, but since dogma evolves, it may no longer be true today. For the Modernist, dogma evolves into whatever accommodates the needs of the current culture. This is refuted by the fact that the dogmas of the Faith are revealed by God, and God cannot contradict Himself.
5. **Orthodox terminology is maintained, but the definitions of the terms are changed.** Words like "God," "Resurrection," "Trinity," and "salvation" are all used by the Modernist, but what they mean by these terms has nothing to do with what these terms have traditionally meant in the history of the Church. For this reason, Modernists may appear to be orthodox, but one eventually discovers their true nature once they dig more deeply into the meaning of the terminology they use. This view of dogma was refuted by the First Vatican Council: "Hence, too, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is ever to be maintained which has once been declared by holy mother church, and there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext or in the name of a more profound understanding" (*On Faith and Reason*, 14).

The Origins of Modernism

1. **The Protestant Revolution.** For the Protestant, the individual rejects the Magisterium established by Christ and replaces it with the individual. Given this view, it was only a matter of time that the individual would be elevated to a position to interpret and define all matters of faith and morals for himself.
2. **The Enlightenment.** The Enlightenment rejected all divine revelation and exalted man's ability, by reason alone, to determine what is true in matters of faith and morals. This eventually led to the Modernist view that the individual, and not God or Magisterium, determines what is true.
3. **Early 20th-Century Theologians.** Modernism was especially made popular by early 20th-century theologians like Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell, among others. These men were eventually excommunicated for their espousal of Modernism.

Modernism in the Church Today

1. **Modernism in the Liturgy.** Modernists do not see the liturgy of the Church as the primary way to worship God. Instead, they see it as an opportunity for man to gather together for purposes other than the worship of God. Thus, they think the liturgy shouldn't be primarily about what God wants, but about what modern man likes. For the Modernist, liturgy is primarily about sentimentality and not the worship of God.
2. **Modernism in Dogma.** Another prevalent example of Modernism in the Church today is the "hermeneutic of discontinuity." This is the view that sees everything before Vatican II as obsolete. In other words, since doctrine evolves for the Modernist, the things that were true before Vatican II do not necessarily apply to the Church after Vatican II. For the Modernist, a new Church was created after Vatican II, and this Church has new truths that are not necessarily the same as those before Vatican II (e.g., Karl Rahner's view of Vatican II, refuted [here](#)).
3. **Modernism in Scripture Studies.** Modernism has infected the Church

in Scripture studies by what is called Higher Criticism. Higher Criticism is an approach to Scripture that often questions the historicity of events mentioned in Scripture. A recent example of the heresy of Modernism in Scripture studies is Cardinal Kasper, who openly denies the historicity of the miracles of Christ (see [here](#) for more).

Magisterial Responses to Modernism

The Church has officially condemned Modernism in the following documents:

1. [*Lamentabili Sane*](#), Pope St. Pius X (1907)
2. [*Paschendi Dominici Gregis*](#), Pope St. Pius X (1907)

Read more about Modernism [here](#). Specifically search on [Modernism](#). Note that: you must register, registration is free.