

# Modernism

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 13, 1921, pages 278.

All true Christians have been shocked by the recent rationalistic utterances of different public men holding high official positions in the religious world.

Alas! there is nothing new in attacks upon the Word of God and the Person of Christ. Such were made in the early days of Christianity and have continued, in different forms, throughout the era. During the past century many such attacks were made in a subtle, veiled, and more or less refined form, as in the case of the famous (or infamous) "Essays and Reviews." To-day, however, what is somewhat new is the open boldness, and coarse effrontery, with which so-called ministers of religion have become leaders in propagating the obscenities of spiritualism, in rearing the red flag of revolution, in the introduction of every form of worldliness, and above all in assailing revelation, and attacking the Person and work of Christ.

In order that the Christian should be preserved from underrating this great evil on the one hand, or from being overcome by it on the other, it is of the first importance to view it in the very full light afforded by Scripture.

In the light of Scripture the appearance of evil teachers, amongst the professing people of God, cannot occasion any surprise. It is foretold in numerous Scriptures in the New Testament which plainly warn us that, in the last days of the Christian era, difficult times would come in which men would arise having "a form of godliness" but denying "the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3. 1-5); and that there will be false teachers "who privily shall bring in damnable heresies even denying the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter 2: 1).

Moreover we must not look for any improvement, for we are expressly warned by Scripture that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3: 13).

Again, we must be prepared for these evil doctrines becoming increasingly popular with the great mass of lifeless professors, for we read, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4: 3).

On the other hand, the light of Scripture will prevent us from overrating the evil effects of false teachers. They will never be able to pluck one of Christ's sheep out of His hand. For has not the Lord said of His sheep, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand."

Scripture also exposes the true character of these false teachers and makes abundantly clear their utter incompetence to understand, or expound things which can only be known by the Holy Spirit. A man may have had the best university and theological training, he may possess the very highest intellectual abilities, he may be a Doctor of Divinity, a theological professor, and fill the highest position in the ecclesiastical world, but all these things, so highly esteemed by men, will not in themselves give him any capacity to comprehend, or competency to expound, the truths of God. Before giving heed to one who professes to instruct us in Divine things, Scripture warrants us in requiring some evidence that such an one has discovered himself to be a sinner in the sight of God, and, through faith in a living and personal Saviour, has received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. If he knows nothing of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," he is

simply a natural man not having the Spirit.

Is there anything, we may well ask, in the utterances of these modernist teachers that would give any real hope that they are truly converted men? In a day of ruin and confusion we gladly fall back upon the Scripture that tells us, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." On the other hand we are also told, "By their fruits ye shall know them," so that we have no right to reckon amongst the children of God those whose utterances deny the vital truths of Christianity.

Here then, we fear, is the simple explanation of these foolish and evil statements in regard to the Bible and the Christ of God. They are the statements of men who we can only regard as unregenerate — natural men, not having the Spirit. And without the Spirit, Scripture definitely states there is no capacity to understand the things of God, "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2: 11). And not only is he unable to enter into Divine things, but they are actually *foolishness* to him, as we read, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2: 14). Thus, for example, in the eyes of Canon Barnes and others, the story of Creation as unfolded in the book of Genesis is just a foolish myth, the product of an unenlightened age. So, too, Dean Inge, a man of great natural ability, is, in things Divine, so utterly dense that he tells us he cannot see that the story of Jonah has anything more to do with the "Christian religion"\* than the story of Jack and the Bean Stalk.

{\*We might of course inquire, What does the learned Dean mean by "the Christian Religion?" Does he mean Christianity according to the Revelation of God or Christianity according to the conception of man? We can only suppose the latter, seeing that the Dean appears to set such little store by the Revelation of God. In this case we should be inclined to agree with the Dean that the story of Jonah, as indeed much else that is in the Bible, has little or nothing to do with it. So much the worse for modern Christian religion. No one, however, who believes in an infallible revelation from God, and in the absolute authority of the Lord Jesus, will fail to recognize that the Lord Himself has for ever linked the story of Jonah with the most vital truths of the Christianity of the Bible (Matt. 12: 39, 40).}

Truly the natural eye can be trained to see marvellous things in the realm of nature, the ear can enjoy entrancing sounds, and the heart of man be moved by the deepest human emotions, but even so, there is a whole world of blessing and glory which lies entirely outside the range of the finest natural intellect. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." But, to the people of God these things have been revealed by the Spirit of God. This, however, is a closed world to the natural man, for unless born of the Spirit, no man can even see the things that belong to the Kingdom of God, much less enter that fair kingdom (Matt. 18: 3 and John 3: 3).

For the men, who in the presence of the light of the Gospel are content to remain in an unregenerate state, the Christian can only have pity; for their profane and infidel utterances nothing but unmingled contempt.

There is, however, another phase of this modernist movement which is characteristic of the last days. The natural man has never been truly subject to a revelation from God; at the same time, for many generations, professing Christians have been outwardly controlled by a more or less orthodox traditional religion. To-day, however, we are witnessing a great change. Men are casting aside the trammels of tradition. We are thus faced with a great mass of people who, while retaining a profession of Christianity, are no longer governed by *the revelation of God*, or *the tradition of man*. The result being that the natural heart of fallen man is expressing its enmity and opposition to God and to Christ

without any restraint. This means in fact that Christendom is heading for apostasy.

The dull-grey condition of orthodox tradition is passing, and men are declaring themselves as either black or white, a sure sign that we are nearing the end.

This, however, implies that there is also a distinct movement among the people of God, evidences of which are increasing on every side. It is written, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa. 59: 19). Are there not signs of a movement of the Spirit whereby the people of God are purging themselves from the vessels to dishonour; definitely asserting that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" contending "for the faith which was once delivered to the saints;" announcing the Gospel in season and out of season; and looking for the coming of the Lord.

The Lord is separating the precious from the vile, thus forming two distinct companies: one the lifeless profession, indifferent to Christ and tolerant of every evil, passing on to apostasy, to be spued out of Christ's mouth as utterly nauseous to Him; the other a company of blood-bought people, that keep His Word and will not deny His Name, passing on to that long-looked-for moment when at the shout of the Lord they will be caught up "together" to be for ever with the Lord.

If these things are so, it behoves every true believer to declare plainly to which company he belongs. When Christ is assailed and the Word of God attacked, no true-hearted Christian can remain neutral. The word is very plain — "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord," and again, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (2 Cor. 6. 14-18).