

**"Hope that is seen is not hope; for why does someone still hope for what he sees?"  
(Rom.8: 24)**

+ **Lecture 4: Modernism, "In science we trust"** +

**I) The Modernist approach to Christianity:**

Modernism, in theology is an attempt to reinterpret Christian doctrines in term of the scientific thought. The Modernists treat the prophecies and miracles of Holy Scriptures as poetical imaginings. They reject anything that is not supported by scientific data or proof. Modernists tend to deny the objective value of traditional beliefs and to regard some dogmas of the Church as symbolic rather than literally true.

Events like the flood, The partition of the Red Sea, Jonah in the belly of the fish, and the burning of Sodom and Gomorra are regarded as fictions and symbolic stories that didn't really occur. The effectiveness of Sacraments is questioned, Icons are mere paintings on wood, miracles are myths and elusions, and even the resurrection of Christ is becoming a debatable matter.

+ **Comment:**

It is important to emphasize that the discussion of Modernism does not mean that the Church is rejecting anything 'modern' or that science is evil, Modernism is basically a restating of these words; "Unless I see in His hand the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (Jn.20: 25)

**II) The Limitations of Science: (By Nick Pollard, a Religious Scientist)**

There is no doubt that science has given us a great deal. We watch TVs, use videos, drive cars, and fly in planes. If we get sick we take antibiotics, fit hip replacements or install pacemakers. It's very tempting for us to think that science must be able to provide the answer to life, the universe and everything. However, we need to be clear about the limitations of science. When we come to the most important questions in life, scientists can only provide very limited answers.

Science is useful for answering the 'how?' questions, describing how things work. What science can't do is answer the 'why?' questions - it can't explain why things are as they are. Let me give you a few examples to illustrate what I mean. Think of Isaac Newton sitting underneath the apple tree. He gets hit on the head by an apple and thinks to himself, "*Aha! Gravity!*" Now we may be tempted to think that he explained why the apple fell. He didn't. Scientists still can't tell us why the apple fell. Isaac Newton's great achievement was to describe how it fell. What he said was that the mathematical formula that describes how the apple fell (the inverse square law) also describes the attraction between any lumps of matter. He described how this happens - he didn't explain why.

Let's take another example. Why are you breathing? A scientist could describe how you are breathing. If he hadn't given the problem much thought he might feel he was answering the why question by saying 'Because your muscles are lifting your rib cage, creating a negative pressure in your chest and drawing in air'. But why, I would then ask, are the muscles doing this? 'Because a raised partial pressure of carbon dioxide in the blood circulating through your brain results in the activation of nerves which stimulate our muscles'. Well why is that? 'Because your cells are producing carbon dioxide'. But why is that? 'Because of the action of intracellular enzymes.' But why is that? 'Because

the enzymes are coded by a DNA template'. And why is that? Why? Why? Do you see that we could keep asking 'why?' because what the scientist is actually doing is not explaining why but describing 'how'.

### **III) Seeing is NOT believing:**

Many people say 'seeing is believing' but this statement is far from being accurate. Faith is defined in the Epistle to the Hebrews as being "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb.11: 1), St. Paul wonders, "Why does one still hope for what he sees?" (Rom.8: 24), he also said, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2Corinth.5: 7). It was said that the devil appeared to a monk while he was praying and told him, 'I am Christ your Lord'. The monk quickly covered his eyes saying, 'I don't want to see Christ while I 'm still in the flesh'. The devil couldn't endure the wisdom and humility of this monk who wanted to live by faith and not by sight.

Through faith we are actually seeing the invisible as St. Paul; explains, "we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2Corinth.4: 18). Indeed "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn.20: 29).

### **IV) The press machine:**

Pope Cyril IV (1854-1861), the father of renaissance in the Coptic Church, bought a printing press from Austria. When the machine arrived in Cairo the Pope was in the Monastery of St. Anthony so His Holiness ordered that the machine would be paraded from the railway station to the Patriarchate with great ceremony and Church hymns. Many criticized the Pope for doing that and His Holiness reply to them was, "If I were present, I would have leaped in front of this machine the same way David leaped in front of the Ark of the Covenant<sup>Ⓢ</sup>". The people who criticized the Pope looked at the printing machine and saw metal, ink, and letters. But His Holiness saw in this machine a generation of educated young men and women, a generation of educated monks and nuns, a generation of educated priests and bishops who will be taking the Coptic Church into the next century. If you examine this machine today in the lab the conclusion of this examination could be 'It's a piece of junk'.

Similarly, modernists will look at an icon and see mere painting on wood but we look at the same icon and see a life of a saint that was blessed by the grace of God, we see a living testimony of the faith, we simply see heaven itself. Now can you come to this conclusion in the lab? What will a lab experiment tell you about the Bible? Just a book! But is the bible really just a book or is it light to our steps and life to our souls? What about the Sacraments, which are visible form of an invisible grace, according to modernists they are mere symbols for who can prove in the lab that the water of Baptism is capable of rebirth and forgiveness of sins? Who can examine the Eucharist under a microscope and see blood cells and muscle cells?

Those who try to subject the matters of faith to the power of human reason and scientific research consider 'faith' a sign of foolishness. We will not disagree for it is written, "It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1Corinth.1: 21).

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<sup>Ⓢ</sup> 'History of the Coptic Church' by Fr. Manasseh Yohana.