

The Reception and Application of the Encyclical *Pascendi*

The Reports of the Diocesan Bishops and the Superiors
of the Religious Orders until 1914

edited by Claus Arnold and Giovanni Vian

The Implementation of the Encyclical *Pascendi* Outline and Background of a Project

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The name of the “conservative reform Pope” Pius X (1903-1904)¹ has been linked to a ‘modernizing’ increase in efficiency of the Roman Curia and of the entire pastoral organisation of the catholic Church – with a decidedly anti-modern tendency.² With the goal of a Christian restauration of society (*Omnia instaurare in Christo*; Eph 1:10), the Pope ‘reformed’ especially the church of Italy by implementing a rigorous visitation.³ Not content with the slow workings of the Roman Congregations of Index and Inquisition, Pius X envisioned new ways of control also for the church around the world in his fight against ‘modernism’. The pope’s Encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*,⁴ which appeared in September 1907, defined ‘modernism’ as the sum of all heresies, a kind of super-heresy of modernity.⁵

1 Aubert, “Pius X.”.

2 Cf. Fantappiè, *Chiesa Romana e Modernità Giuridica*, and the criticism by Vian, “Pio X grande riformatore?”.

3 Vian, *La riforma della Chiesa*.

4 On the making of *Pascendi* see Arnold, “Antimodernismo e magistero romano”.

5 For a first orientation about ‘modernism’ cf. Arnold, *Kleine Geschichte des Modernismus*; Vian, *Il modernismo*.

1 The Concept of ‘Modernism’

In face of the profound scientific and religious changes around 1900, the Pope was possessed by the fear that a group of theologians and churchmen were conspiring to dissolve the church from within. He called them ‘modernists’ and their heresy ‘modernism’. He feared this group would erode the faith by a relativistic criticism of dogma and the bible, by a merely immanent philosophy, only to newly invent the Church as a purely agnostic body. The Pope also feared profound changes in the traditional structure of the church. “Ecclesiastical government requires to be reformed in all its branches, but especially in its disciplinary and dogmatic parts. Its spirit is to be reconciled with the public modern conscience, which is now wholly for democracy; a share in ecclesiastical government should therefore be given to the lower ranks of the clergy, and even to the laity, and authority should be decentralized”.⁶ For Pius X an apocalyptic situation had come; he wanted to meet the satanic threat of modernism with a strong act of centralized authority, which has been unique in church history. He did not stop at revealing the allegedly coherent heretical system of modernism in his encyclical. He wanted to expose single modernists worldwide through disciplinary methods. According to his logic, most reform theologians were ‘modernists’ even if they did not openly and completely adhere to the Pope’s idea of heresy.

2 The Measures Against ‘Modernism’

In *Pascendi*, Pope Pius X not only defined ‘modernism’ as an all-encompassing heretical system, but also formulated practical measures for the enforcement of scholastic philosophy and theology, measures to reprimand lecturers and seminarians, measures for book censorship and guidelines for implementing anti-modernist control committees (*consilia a vigilantia*) in each diocese. Furthermore, the encyclical required that the bishops of all the dioceses had to write a report in the year after the publication of *Pascendi*, and consecutively write a follow-up report every three years to “conscientiously and under oath report on the measures implemented, on the doctrines that circulate among seminarians, clerics and other catholic institutes – also those that are not subject to the local bishop”. The same guidelines were addressed to the “superiors of religious orders and their

6 *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 40, 1907, 593-650: 631: “Regimen ecclesiae omni sub respectu reformandum clamitant, praecipue tamen sub disciplinari ac dogmatico. Ideo intus forisque cum moderna, ut aiunt, conscientia componendum, quae tota ad democratiam vergit: ideo inferiori clero ipsisque laicis suae in regimine partes tribuendae, et collecta nimirum contractaque in centum auctoritas dispertienda”.

subordinates”.⁷ These reports, that began to arrive at the Roman Curia in 1908, have never been the subject of an extensive scientific research project. Even though the tactics of some national episcopates on how to deal with the roman anti-modernism have already been studied,⁸ the present book opens up a broader look on the range and grasp of anti-modernism on a local level, as well as the interpretations and implementations of the Roman measures by the bishops and religious superiors. For the first time, this project brings together the reports, which are scattered in the Roman archives, and evaluates them comparatively. This enables us to see an international picture of the widespread effect of anti-modernism until 1914 (and, at least indirectly, of the general situation of the Catholic Church at the beginning of the twentieth century). At the same time, the various local interpretations and strategies (either of how to immunize against the repression or of how to maximize its effect) come into focus. Furthermore this project shows the somewhat competition-driven inner-curial handling of the reports⁹ and their meaning for the subsequent anti-modernist pragmatic under Pius X.

3 The Place of the Project in the Historiography on ‘Modernism’

The historiography on ‘modernism’ has been very rich since the sixties¹⁰ and came to a certain conclusion and synthesis in the late nineties.¹¹ Understandably, it mainly focused on the work and fate of the so-called ‘modernists’.¹² However, thanks to the opening of the Archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith,¹³ research in the last decade has also

7 Cf. *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 40, 1907, 640-50.

8 For Germany see Trippen, *Theologie und Lehramt im Konflikt*. On the effect on University Theology cf. Weiß, *Modernismuskontroverse und Theologenstreit*.

9 Cf. in this volume Dieguez, “Tra competenze e procedure”.

10 Cf. for instance Poulat, *Histoire, dogme et critique*. Bedeschi, *La Curia Romana durante la Crisi Modernista*.

11 Botti, Cerrato, *Il Modernismo tra Cristianità e Secolarizzazione*; Jodock, *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*; Wolf, *Antimodernismus und Modernismus*.

12 Arnold, “Neuere Forschungen zur Modernismuskrise”; Vian, “La riflessione sulla crisi modernista”. Eminent exceptions were the works of Poulat on Integralism and Bedeschi on the Roman Curia in the times of anti-modernism.

13 Cf. Wolf, Schepers, *In wilder zügelloser Jagd nach Neuem*. Helpful tools for research in the ACDF are the volumes *Grundlagenforschung* ed. by Wolf in his series *Römische Inquisition und Indexkongregation*. Cf. for instance Schwedt, *Prosopographie von Römischer Inquisition und Indexkongregation*.

taken a closer look at anti-modernism and, for the first time, reconstructed the internal discussions on the main anti-modernist measures and documents within the Holy Office and the Congregation of the Index.¹⁴ At the same time, other newly accessible archival material, especially from the ‘Segretariola’ of Pio X in the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano* has contributed significantly to our knowledge of the Pontificate of Pius X.¹⁵ The centenary of the encyclical *Pascendi* in 2007 was the occasion for conferences that led to a summing up of the new research¹⁶ and also to some monographic syntheses of the topic.¹⁷ On the whole, the new archival research has contributed to a more differentiated picture of the workings of the Roman Curia¹⁸ under Pius X and to a more specific evaluation of the different theological orientations which were present within the Curia at the times of anti-modernism and also of how they were intertwined with anti-modernist networks in Europe and worldwide. After these findings the logical question of how the anti-modernist measures were perceived on a worldwide level arose, which first led to research on the ‘local’ echo of the decree *Lamentabili*¹⁹ and the encyclical *Pascendi*.²⁰ Connected to this is finally the question of the “practical implementation” of the anti-modernist measures of *Pascendi* in the respective dioceses, which is the topic of the present publication.

4 Immediate Reactions to *Pascendi*

The immediate reaction of the local episcopates to *Pascendi* already gives some glimpses of their later strategies in dealing with the practical measures of the encyclical. After it had been published in September 1907 in

14 Arnold, Vian, *La condanna del modernismo*; Arnold, Losito, ‘*Lamentabili sane exitu*’ (1907); Arnold, Losito, *La censure d’Alfred Loisy* (1903); Cf. also Weiß, “Der Glaubenswächter Van Rossum”.

15 Dieguez, *L’Archivio particolare di Pio X*; Dieguez, *Carte Pio X*; Dieguez, “La nuova documentazione dell’Archivio Vaticano”; Pagano, “Inediti su celebri ‘modernisti’ barnabiti”. Cf. also the publications for the centenary of the death of Pius X, which demonstrate the challenge of evaluating historically the pontificate of Papa Sarto: Regoli, *San Pio X*; Brugnotto, Romanato, *Riforma del Cattolicesimo*.

16 Wolf, Schepers, *In wilder zügelloser Jagd nach Neuem*; Nicoletti, Weiß, *Il modernismo in Italia e in Germania*.

17 Arnold, *Kleine Geschichte des Modernismus*; Verucci, *L’eresia del Novecento*; Vian, *Il modernismo*.

18 On the Roman Curia in general cf. Jankowiak, *La Curie romaine de Pie IX à Pie X*.

19 Losito, “La preparazione del decreto *Lamentabili*”.

20 Sardella, “Il y a cent ans”; Vian, “*La Pascendi*”.

a perfectly instrumented campaign which transmitted a summary of the encyclical directly to the press and offered Italian, French and English translated documents as well, many bishops, but also priests and laymen did not wait long to answer. After all it belonged to the characteristics of the ultramontane mobilization of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth and twentieth century to answer any major pontifical act with a so-called 'letter of adherence' (*lettera di adesione*), which assured the Holy Father of one's filial devotion and gratitude, as soon as possible. Hundreds of such letters answering *Pascendi* fill the relevant fascicles of the Vatican secret archives.²¹ Virtually the first letter was sent by Marie-Jean Célestin, bishop of Beauvais. He received the text of the encyclical on the 17th of September 1907 and on the very next day, the 18th of September, he issued the implementation of the decree for his diocese – including the appointment of censors and the control committee – as he proudly reported to Rome. This kind of alacrity should not go unnoticed: Pius X himself drafted a letter of gratitude to Célestin in which he confirmed that he was the first Bishop in the world to have implemented the encyclical.²²

Many of the adherence letters, especially from Italian- and French-speaking regions, were not sparing with their eulogies of the Pope: His inerrant teachings had brilliantly revealed the errors of the modernists. With biblical references the Pope is compared to Christ and St. Peter: like Peter he encouraged his brothers (Lk 22:32), like Christ he has words of immortal life (Joh 6:68). Especially from Italy and France entire lists with signatures of Priests from the entire deaneries and dioceses were sent in. Praise, of course, came mainly from those bishops that beforehand had urged the Pope to do something against the modernist threat, like the archbishop of Nancy and Toul, Charles-François Turinaz, who had already written to Pius X as early as December 1903, informing him that not only modernist theologians like Alfred Loisy and Albert Houtin had to be confronted, but also the Christian democrats: they were like a sect, as disloyal as the Jansenists and not only disputed dogmas, but also aspired to revolutionize the society and the Church by negating the supernatural part in Christianity and thus leading to complete apostasy.²³ Accordingly, Turinaz recognized the encyclical as an admirable document of authority and of the deep wisdom of the Roman Popes and as one of the best examples of divine support for the Church.

21 ASV, *Segr. Stato*, 1908, rubr. 82, fasc. 1-8. Vian, "La *Pascendi*".

22 ASV, *Segr. Stato*, 1908, rubr. 82, fasc. 2, ff. 45-9.

23 ASV, *Segr. Stato*, 1908, rubr. 82, fasc. 8, f. 124-5: 125v: "Les Démocrates chrétiens sont une véritable secte, aussi déloyale que cette des Jansénistes, et qui conteste pas seulement quelques dogmes chrétiens, mais qui va à la révolution absolue dans la société et dans l'Eglise, à la négation du surnaturel dans le christianisme et, par conséquent, à une complète apostasie". Cf. Vian, "La *Pascendi*", 98.

Next to such enthusiastic receptions of the encyclical one can also find more differentiated statements that follow a strategy we can also find in the later reports. The entire episcopate of England, gathered around Archbishop Francis Bourne of Westminster, for example, wrote the following to the Pope: The outrageous and insane errors that Pius X had condemned, had luckily “infected only a very small portion of England’s Catholics”.²⁴ This strategy directly opposed the Pope’s fear of a dangerous modernist sect, by tending to immunize against the implementation of the encyclical *Pascendi*. Archbishop Francis Bourne of Westminster had already taken a similar line after the publication of the decree *Lamentabili*.²⁵ The English bishops followed this tendency also in their reports:²⁶ Modernism was mainly a problem of individuals like Alfred Fawkes, George Tyrrell and Maude Petre,²⁷ who could be dealt with – and were dealt with – in a disciplinary manner.²⁸ Unlike ‘Liberal Catholicism’, which had been already

24 ASV, *Segr. Stato*, 1908, rubr. 82, fasc. 3, f. 23: Archbishop Francis Bourne of Westminster to Pius X, 10. October 1907: “Beatissime Pater, Nos, Archiepiscopus et Episcopi Angliae, ad tria nomina pro Sede vacante Northantonensi proponenda congressi, idonea hac occasione libentissime utimur qua, ad pedes Sanctitatis Vestrae provoluti, pro Litteris Encyclicis de Modernistarum Doctrinis Orbi Catholico recenter datis gratias ex imo corde agamus quam maximas. – Errores impii et insani, a Summo Pastore Fideique Interprete et Defensore ad gregis universi in divina Catholica doctrina tutelam proscripti, paucissimos tantummodo, inter Catholicos saltem, in Anglia infecerunt. Ut autem, verbis Sanctitatis Vestrae admoniti et illuminati, omnes ubicumque his erroribus jam infecti ad veritatem redeant, aliique omnes ab huiusmodi erroribus arceantur, Deum Omnipotentem, per Mariae Virginis Immaculatae intercessionem, enixe rogamus, opem nostram, tota quanta est, in id collaturi, ut quaecumque a Sanctitate Vestra nuper decreta fuerint in effectum deducantur. – Pro gregibus nostris, quorum fides Catholica et erga Sanctam Sedem obedientia explorata est, ac pro nobismet ipsis, Benedictionem Apostolicam imploramus”.

25 ASV, *Segr. Stato* 1908, rub. 82, fasc. 1, f. 13r. Archbishop Bourne to Cardinal Merry del Val, 21 July 1907: “The Bishops have rightly been anxious about the whole question concerned, and this guidance of the Holy See will be most useful and precious to them. Happily only a very few Catholic writers in England have allowed themselves to stray into dangerous directions, and their influence is distinctly on the wane. But among young men there has been sometimes an inclination to catch unwarily at new ideas. This inclination will now be checked, for there is no doubt of their entire loyalty to the teachings of the Church”. On Bourne’s tolerant attitude towards modernism and his protection for Wilfrid Ward and Friedrich von Hügel, cf. Leonard, “English Catholicism and Modernism”, 267-9.

26 Cf. the list of reports in the Appendix. Archbishop Bourne’s one and only report from 1908 (ACDF, *Stanza Storica*, Q 4 cc, ff. 60-1) is practically without concrete content. Bourne has formally implemented the measures, but asks permission for less frequent meetings of the *consilium a vigilantia*. – Unfortunately, the colleague who was supposed to study the reception in Great Britain and Ireland was prevented from finishing her text for publication. For some observations on Ireland cf. the comparative contribution of Giovanni Vian in this volume.

27 Rafferty, *George Tyrrell and Catholic Modernism*.

28 Cf. the reports of Bishop Amigo of Southwark, which he sent to the Holy Office in 1908 and 1911 (ACDF, *Stanza Storica*, Q 4 cc, ff. 196-7; ff. 25, 27). In the case of the death and burial of George Tyrrell, Amigo collaborated closely with Cardinal Merry del Val.

condemned by the Joint Pastoral of the English bishops in 1900,²⁹ 'Modernism' was not seen as a dangerous 'movement' in England.

The strategy of the German bishops had the same effect: they operated with a "narrow" concept of modernism, which was restricted to a philosophical-theological agnosticism and immanentism – excluding "reformism" and "social modernism" – and thus they could claim they did not have any 'real' modernism in their dioceses.³⁰

Even more subtle than the English and the German was the Belgian answer to the Pope. On the one hand the Belgians practically showered Pius X with promises of loyalty: Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier, Archbishop of Mechelen, let not only the entire episcopate, but also the entire teaching faculty of the Catholic University of Leuven as well as all of all the theological colleges and seminaries sign a printed statement on *Pascendi* – all in all a documentation of 160 pages – and sent it to Rome.³¹ However, when reading this statement it rather reminds of an advertising brochure for the new scholastic philosophy taught in Leuven, which was actually more orientated towards the former Pope Leo XIII than to Pius X. ³² Mercier suggested that if Leo XIII's disciplinary recommendations to the bishops of France had been followed in 1899,³³ *Pascendi* would not have been necessary. The implicit message thus was: nothing had to change in Belgium, since everything already was in the best of order.

Next to these more or less elaborately configured immunization strategies, maximalist interpretations and implementations seem to have been observed as well. A straight refusal to implement these measures should be observable as well. Thus a wide field of international comparison concerning the reception of anti-modernism opens up, both on the discursive handling of the heretical concept of 'modernism', as well as on the consequences for the intellectual-religious life in the dioceses. Furthermore, the extent and character of the 'return rate' of the reports on *Pascendi* could give some conclusions on the following anti-modernist measures by Pius X, especially with regard to the implementation of the anti-modernist oath.³⁴

Cf. Boudens, "George Tyrrell", and the forthcoming article Arnold, "Pius X., Merry del Val and the Cases of Alfred Loisy and George".

29 Schultenover, *A view from Rome*, 131-58.

30 Trippen, *Theologie und Lehramt im Konflikt*.

31 ASV, *Segr. Stato*, 1908, rubr. 82, fasc. 5, ff. 2-89.

32 Cf. Van Riet, *Kardinal Désiré Mercier (1851-1926)*, 206-40.

33 Mercier alludes to the encyclical *Depuis le jour* of 8th September 1899, by which Loisy felt himself personally attacked. Cf. Poulat, *Alfred Loisy*, 88.

34 Cf. now the seminal study of Schepers, *Streitbare Brüder*.

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