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GEORGE TYRRELL AND LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM: AN ESSAY IN DEVELOPMENT

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George Tyrrell was born in Dublin on February 6th 1861, and educated at Rathmines school, a day establishment where the discipline was 'too Irish, too easy', but modelled 'on Arnoldian lines', with 'plenty of corruption and free fighting', and where he achieved 'a quiet steady record of low mediocrity'[1]. His home background was Evangelical, but in 1875 he began to attend the old-fashioned high-church services at Grangegorman church. His anglo-catholicism was at first largely accidental, and, as he later claimed, entirely external; but it awakened in him a longing for reality in religion, a desire for moral reform, and a fascination with Roman Catholicism, which he quickly came to think 'the goal towards which High Churchism was an impeded movement'. In 1878 he went up to Trinity College, where his friendship with the young Robert Dolling helped give theological backbone to his religious position; nevertheless he gravitated increasingly away from Anglicanism. Though he travelled to London with Dolling in March 1879 to work with him at St Alban's, Holborn, it was clear to both of them by then that Tyrrell would become a Roman Catholic. Tyrrell loathed the Anglo-Catholicism he found in London, 'a sort of ecclesiastical debauch', and on Palm Sunday 1879 was unable to remain in St Alban's during the blessing of palms. Full of 'sickness and anger and disappointment' at a service which for all its decorum and beauty was not 'the utterance of the great communion of the faithful, past and present, of all ages and nations', but merely 'of a few irresponsible agents acting in defiance of the community to which they belonged', he wandered across the road to the Roman Catholic church of St Etheldreda's, Ely Place. There, in darkness, and 'mid the smell of a dirty Irish crowd, the same service was being conducted, in nasal tones, most unmusically, by three very typically popish priests'. This experience was for him decisive. 'Of course it was mere emotion and sentiment, and I set no store by it either then or now, but oh! the sense of reality! here was the old business, being carried on by the old firm, in the old ways; here was continuity, that took one back to the catacombs[2]; here was no need of, and therefore no suspicion of, pose or theatrical parade; its aesthetic blemishes were its very beauties for me in that mood'[3]. By the end of May 1879 Tyrrell had become a Roman Catholic; by September he had joined the Jesuit order.

The story of Tyrrell's conversion to Catholicism[4], told with characteristic self-laceration in the *Autobiography* he wrote for his devoted disciple and biographer Maud Petre, has been dwelt on here for the light it throws on the personal roots of Tyrrell's later career. His alternate hatred of Catholicism for its unreality and empty show, and his love of its integrity and completeness, the link it provided with humanity past, present and future in its quest for God, were to dominate his later writings as they dominate his account of his religious awakening. More than any other of the Catholic modernists Tyrrell's writings are expressions of his own spiritual journey, and are to be understood only by reference to it.

Tyrrell portrays his Jesuit career as one of progressive disillusionment, but in fact it was in many ways a distinguished and successful one, at least up to the publication of his first book in 1897. Despite a mercurial temperament, exacerbated by recurrent migraine, despite also a caustic and often lacerating wit, he had the gift of friendship, and was popular with his fellow Jesuits. Ordained in 1891, he went the following year as curate at the Jesuit mission in St Helens, Lancashire, where he was blissfully happy, and where he first discovered his gift of spiritual direction. Much against his will he left St Helens in 1894 to become professor of philosophy at Stonyhurst College; and here it may be said that his contribution to modernism began.

Roman Catholicism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was intellectually and morally depressed. Its theological schools were still dominated by a degenerate scholasticism which owed little to Aquinas, and were dedicated to the justification of the offensive/defensive polemic of Pio Nono's ultramontanism. The

comparative liberalism of Leo XIII was, however, beginning to make itself felt, in the canonisation of 'social catholicism' in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, and in the revival of Thomism signalised by *Aeterni Patris*. The general if modest liberalism represented by these measures was not taken up with any enthusiasm by English Catholics, but at Stonyhurst Tyrrell threw himself wholeheartedly into the Thomist revival. He began, in his own words, to 'turn the young men into Dominicans'. There was in this something of the convert's zeal, but it was more. Tyrrell had been revolted by the rigidity of contemporary Catholic thinking, and believed that 'Aquinas represents a far less developed theology than that of the later schoolmen . . . by going back to him one escapes from many of the superstructures of his more narrow-minded successors'. Tyrrell found in Thomas 'an elastic sympathy with contemporary culture -a spirit soon forgotten in a rabinical zeal for conformity to the bare letter of his teaching'[5]. In fact his own pugnacious espousal of Thomism against the Society's traditional Suarezian teaching led to his removal from Stonyhurst in 1896. But he was not in disgrace, and moved to Farm Street as one of the Society's apologists and publicists, and a regular contributor to *The Month*. He was also becoming increasingly popular and widely known as a spiritual director, much in demand for retreats, and considered a specialist in dealing with sufferers from 'difficulties and doubts'[6].

Out of this pastoral concern his first book grew. *Nova et Vetera*, published in 1897, was a collection of informal meditations, and contains much of his most distinctive and beautiful writing. The book changed Tyrrell's life, for it was the occasion of his first meeting with Baron Friedrich von Hugel. In so far as 'Modernism' existed as a coherent movement, von Hugel was its centre, its organising genius. Though a layman he had devoted his life to theological studies, and was conversant with the most advanced theological work, whether protestant or catholic, then being carried out in Europe. He made it his business to promote personal contact between liberal-minded catholics and protestant workers in theology, and his friends included the most promising of catholic biblical scholars, Alfred Loisy, as well as German, French and English Protestants such as Eucken, Sabatier, Troeltsch and Caird. Von Hugel, impressed by *Nova et Vetera*, now 'took up' Tyrrell, he began to direct his reading, bullied him into learning German, and forced him to read extensively in the field of biblical criticism. His power over Tyrrell was immense. 'Every time I meet you or hear from you', Tyrrell told him in February 1901, 'I am poked on a little further, but, like a wheelbarrow, I am not susceptive of sustained impetus, but stick where I am dropped'[7]. He was never allowed to stick for long, and the process of 'poking on' was painful. Von Hugel is an enigmatic figure; his slow, ruminative mind, cautious and addicted to minute shadings and qualifications, was able to hold side by side a deep and traditional catholic piety, and a radical and even drastic historical and biblical scepticism, without apparent discomfort[8]. Tyrrell was less able to cope with such contradictions, and at Christmas 1902 wrote in anguish to his friend Henri Bremond:

> 'Saying the midnight Mass for the nuns for whom it was all so real, life-giving, factual and tangible I could fain have cried out "Date nobis de oleo vestro", hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt and loathing the thin and windy manna of criticism and truth. And then, appealing to my emotional feeblensss, round came the waits at 2 a.m. with their "Glad tidings of great joy" till I could have damned all the critics into Hell, if they had but left me such a receptacle. However they wound up with a somewhat dolorous rendering of "so long thy power hath blessed me, etc". And so I went asleep with a vague hope that in some, as yet unguessable, way, we should find the synthesis, and that the angel-faces of the beliefs, loved long since and lost awhile, would shine out on us again glorified and eternalized'[9].

Tyrrell's search for a synthesis between traditional belief and modern critical science was to preoccupy him for the remainder of his short life, and was an epitome of the major problem of reorientation facing not Catholics alone but Christianity itself at the turn of the century. Put simply, the problem was that of relating historical orthodoxy, and in particular Christology and Trinitarian theology, to the picture of Jesus and of early Christian origins which was emerging from the work of men like Weiss, Pfleiderer, and Harnack. For Catholics the problem was particu-

larly acute, for they were confronted with the task of justifying the dogmatic, sacramental and hierarchical system which historical research showed to have been the product of centuries of growth, but for which the Church had immemorially claimed Christ's specific institution. It was this concern which was to produce the classical 'Modernist' utterance, Loisy's *L'Evangile et L'Eglise*. Liberal Catholic apologetic was normally based on some version or other of Newman's theory of development, and up to August 1900 Tyrrell himself was convinced that a doctrine of development would explain the apparent discrepancy between modern Catholicism and primitive Christianity. The 'deposit' of revelation was, he wrote,

> 'susceptible of a three-fold development—first by the analysis of the literal and abstract sense of the words delivered or the ideas created in the minds of the first hearers; secondly by the intermarriage of truths revealed with the truths and experiences naturally possessed by the minds of the hearers at any given period; thirdly, by the growth of the collective intelligence of the Church, whereby the concrete meaning of the original utterances, the truth they hinted at but could not contain, is better divined.' [10]

This position did not long satisfy Tyrrell. It involved two assumptions which he could not accept. Firstly, in this theory the 'deposit of revelation' seemed to grow, and nineteenth century theologians to 'better divine' the truths of revelation than St Augustine or even the Apostles. Secondly, in assuming continuous development between the elaborated theology of modern Catholicism and the original 'deposit', the theory invested that theology at least derivatively with the status of a sort of secondary revelation, and reduced the deposit itself to a set of theological first principles. Tyrrell sought a solution which would distinguish between revelation and theology, and which would relegate the latter to its proper and secondary position. His first attempt at a solution was published in *The Month* for November 1899, under the title 'The Relation of Theology to Devotion'. Tyrrell later claimed that all his developed teaching was explicitly contained in this essay—'I have simply eddied round and round the same point'[11]. Its argument is simple enough. All our knowledge of God is analogical; he can be conceived only anthropomorphically and in metaphor. Metaphysical and theological speculation about God are 'of the thinnest and most uninstructive description' in direct proportion to their distance from the 'grossness' of popular religious conceptions. God has revealed himself 'not to the theologians or the philosophers, but to the babes, to fishermen, to peasants'. The task of scientific theology is wholly regulative or corrective—to moderate the abuses and extremes of popular notions of God. The church's task as guardian of revelation is to preserve 'this concrete, coloured, imaginative expression of Divine mysteries as it lay in the minds of the first recipients'. This original revelation is itself the corrective both of popular devotion and of theology, but devotion is a surer guide to truth than speculation—*Lex orandi est Lex credendi*. The popular devotion to the lonely and neglected 'Prisoner of the Tabernacle' is 'crude and simple', but fundamentally more Christian than the notion of a 'now passionless and apathetic Christ'. Theology, therefore, 'as far as it formulates and justifies the devotion of the best Catholics, and as far as it is true to the life of faith and charity as actually lived, so far is it a law and corrective for all. But where it begins to contradict the facts of that spiritual life, it loses its reality and its authority, and needs itself to be corrected by the *lex orandi*.' [12]

Tyrrell's target in this essay was the sort of scholastic rationalism which he again attacked a month later in 'A Perverted Devotion', an article which resulted in his removal from Farm Street and his 'exile' in the remote fastnesses of Swaledale, at the Jesuit mission in Richmond. Tyrrell had as yet no conception of a general reinterpretation of Christian doctrine as an expression of Christian piety, on lines laid down by Schleiermacher. Indeed in the previous year he had attacked this very idea in a review of Auguste Sabatier's *Vitality of Christian Dogmas*. In that review he had rejected the view that dogma was 'but the language of faith or religion', whose meaning was to be observed 'in life and action, not as fixed or petrified by definition' he had roundly asserted revelation to be 'a supernatural instruction of the mind . . . in all respects similar to the informing of one mind by another.'[13]. Clearly his thinking had shifted

in the course of the intervening year closer to Sabatier's position, away from a 'propositional' view of revelation.

The shift was, of course, the direct result of the reading prescribed by von Hugel. Harnack's *Das Wesen der Christentums* impressed him with 'the madness of supposing we can go on ignoring so plain a fact as the growth of Catholicism out of a germ as unlike Catholicism as a walnut is unlike a walnut tree.' Though he clung to the notion of 'development' as a means of meeting Harnack's challenge he was using language in private which suggested radical disruption rather than gradual development. Catholicism, he told Bremond, had been held rigid so long that 'there must come a sudden bursting of impassible barriers, resulting in inundation and much loss of life . . What will be left in the reconstructed Catholicism is more uncertain matter of prediction.' The tone here is more radical than the content, for he could still envisage that not only belief in the Incarnation, the communion of saints, the sacramental system and 'a teaching *vox populi*', but even 'a modified sort of Papal Infallibility' might possible 'survive the scorching light of criticism.' Nevertheless, Tyrrell was now preoccupied with the 'essential and most characteristic feature of the problem which Modernism has to deal with', the 'historical difficulty'[14]. He was himself no historian—'I am weak in facts' he told A.R. Waller, 'strong only in fancy and fiction', yet von Hugel's mentorship forced 'facts' upon him[15]. He reacted by seeking a formulation of Christianity in which historicity was minimised. Tyrrell's appreciation of Blondel's thought is well known, though his grasp of it has been questioned, but it was in any case simply one aspect of a search for a spiritual reality which was invulnerable to the powerful solvent of criticism. The whole value of our religious theory and symbolism, he wrote in 1901, 'is to give some sort of mental expression and interpretation to those facts of internal experience which are the substance of all religion.' Christ himself was to be sought 'not in the life that he once led outside us', but 'in that which he is continually living within us, and in which every event of the other has its mystical counterpart.'[16] The theoretical underpinning for this approach came as much from protestant post-Kantian and neo-Hegelian thought as from Blondel. He spoke of the 'grateful relief' he found in reading Fichte, whose *Bestimmung der Menschen* 'would help many a soul in search of a firm basis of faith'; after a particularly disturbing visit from von Hugel in September 1902 he told Bremond

> 'The Baron has come and gone, and left me, as usual, with more to think of than I can digest. I wish he would draw up a list, not of what he doesn't believe, but of what he does . . . Were it not for men like Caird and Euchen I don't know where I should be, but these men have touched what Jesus Christ touched. Doubtless God speaks in history, but it is a polysyllabic word of which we miss the ends and therewith the meaning; and unless He is to be found within each soul he is practically unfindable.'[17]

This phase of Tyrrell's thought is encapsulated in *Lex Orandi*, published in 1903. Published, astonishingly, with ecclesiastical approval, this work treats dogma as 'the highest spiritual expression of the will-world that the collective understanding of believers has elaborated by the spiritual labour of centuries', a 'guide or plan to direct our attitude in the will-world'. The church was concerned with history, science, or philosophy only in so far as they bear on 'eternal life'. Thus, 'the *religiously* important criticism to be applied to points of Christian belief whether historical, philosophic or scientific, is not that which interests the historian, philosopher, or scientist, but that which is supplied by the spirit of Christ, the *spiritus qui vivificat*: is the belief in accord with, is it a development of, the spirit of the Gospel? What is its religious value? Does it make for the love of God and man? Does it show us the Father and reveal to us our sonship?' The Virgin Birth, therefore, is to be valued for its fruitfulness in the devotion of the faithful—'the spiritual truth is given to us not in the language of parable but in that of historical fact, which as such is subject to the criteria of history, though as a vehicle of a religious value, as the earthern vessel of a heavenly treasure, it is subject only to the criterion of faith'. Were the Infancy narratives 'merely a legend inspired by some prophet full of the spirit of Christ, this religious value would not be affected'.[18]

This theory was riddled with problems. It seemed to solve the problem of history by sidestepping it—Tyrrell paid lip-service to the fact that Jesus Christ 'is not a purely ideal creation

like King Arthur, but an historical personage', but in *Lex Orandi* he made no real case for the *historicity* of the creeds. Indeed he was accused of maintaining pure pragmatism, of ignoring the question of the truth or falsehood of dogma in favour of its spiritual usefulness. Tyrrell denied the truth of this allegation, but it cannot be said that he refutes it, either in *Lex Orandi* or its sequel, *Lex Credendi*, written in part to meet such charges[19]. What he had produced was in fact a version of Ritschl's 'value theory' of dogma, as he himself admitted, though he claimed to have derived it from William James's *Will to Believe* rather than from Ritschl. He realised, too, that it was 'very wobbly as a criterion for belief . . . You can't sit down and sort existing beliefs as true or false by it', but it did represent 'the life-law by which the collective experience of the Christian people determines whether beliefs shall live or die, or at least be modified'.[20] This was essentially the position he had criticised in August Sabatier's *Vitality of Dogma* in 1897, and the posthumous publication of Sabatier's *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* prompted some uncomfortable self-questioning. 'I ask myself frankly', he told a correspondent, 'am I implicitly a liberal Protestant, or is Sabatier implicitly a liberal Catholic? Or is there still an irreducible difference between us?' Tyrrell believed there was; while at one with the school of Schleiermacher in seeing dogma as the experimental utterance of an essentially non-verbal 'sentiment', not given 'as it were from an external teacher' but slowly evolved 'under the dumb guidance of the Spirit', nevertheless he parted from Liberal Protestantism in seeing the creeds so evolved as *normative*. Tradition, like the canon of scripture, demands inner assent, as the 'record of the self-evolution' of the Spirit. The authority of dogma was 'not merely that of an intellectual guide or artistic standard; but is truly moral and in its very inspiration demanding study and consideration and adaptation to one's own spiritual wants'[21].

Whether this distinction did in fact redeem Tyrrell's theory from a charge of liberal protestantism seems an open question. At any rate he had reached a crucial point in his own theological development. Determined to resist the equation of dogma and 'feeling', he found his dissent from this position difficult to formulate. Tradition, theology, dogma, were vital to any balanced Christianity, yet they needed to be redefined. 'It is not', he told von Hugel, 'as they [the ecclesiastical authorites] suppose, about this or that article of the creed we differ; we accept it all; but it is the word *credo*; the sense of "true" as applied to dogma; the whole value of revelation that is at stake'[22]. His sense of the need for a theological revolution was heightened by a growing disillusionment with the church itself as a vehicle for the Catholicism of the future. The repressive pontificate of Pius X was the principal cause of this disenchantment; comparing the policies of Rome with 'the Czardom or any other tyranny' he told von Hugel that 'I am forced to wonder . . . whether an evil tree can bring forth good fruit and an institution so (it would seem) essentially the foe of liberty and the principles of the Gospel can by any steady evolution develop into that Catholicism of which we dream—except in the sense in which Judaism developed into Christianity'[23].

Throughout 1905 and 1906, then, Tyrrell was wrestling with a series of crucial issues. He rejected the scholastic notion that revelation consisted essentially of a set of immutable propositions, he rejected Sabatier's view that revelation was a continuing experience of which dogma was the ever-changing expressio..; he rejected the liberal catholic attempt to bring these two poles together in a theory of doctrinal development[24]. His proposed solution was twofold. firstly 'a return to the earlier and stricter view of the unchanging, unprogressive character of the apostolic revelation' with a corresponding 'repudiation of all attempts to mitigate the supposed difficulties of this severer view by theories of development'; and secondly the definition of this original revelation or deposit as 'the Spirit of Christ', the divine life of charity and the perfect knowledge of the mystery of God joined in a human life lived once for all -

> He was the King, and he was the Kingdom. Grow how it will, as a vine stretching its branches all over the world, the Church is nothing but Christ. The saints but partake of his fulness. They but manifest what was latent in his spirit. The fulness was there when he was there, the end was involved in the beginning, the fruit in the germ. After the fulness

there can be no new revelation, only an endless unfolding[25].

The revelation of God in Christ is a complex, involving feeling, thought, and action; it finds expression in the apostolic 'deposit', and in the lives of the great saints, 'as partial revelations of the same spirit, but in no wise possibly adding to the substance. With it, as controlling rule and criterion, they make up a growing body of revelation whose parts are not connected dialectically like those of theology, but are related to one another as all the works of the same school of art, namely as various manifestations of one and the same master spirit'[26]. The language in which the Apostolic revelation is expressed was not that of 'a reflex thought-out life theory, but . . . the spontaneous self-expression of a profound religious experience .... a prophetic vision of the kingdom of God directed to the orientation of the spiritual life, and enshrining a mysterious truth independent of those other truths used for its illustration' [27]. These prophetic utterances are evocative, not scientific, and they cannot be systematised, for 'misinterpreted as literal statements of fact they are often inconsistent with one another and with the world of fact-truths'. Yet they legitimately prompt reflection and explication, the proper sphere of theology. This 'science of theology' will be always liable to revolutions according as the accumulations of its own proper sort of experience calls for restatement of its theories and conceptions. These restatements must not be 'mere patchings and lettings-out' but 'transformations, the dying of form into form—the new containing the old virtually and effectually'. Side by side with this theology should grow a 'living and growing creed or body of dogmas and mysteries reflecting and embodying the spiritual growth and development of the community'[28].

These views, formulated and published before Tyrrell's excommunication in 1907, were underpinned by a wider preoccupation, which was to have momentous consequences for the final phase of his thought, culminating in *Christianity at the Crossroads*, his most important and most characteristic work. As early as 1903 he had told von Hugel that 'the question of the relation of Christianity to other religions is just the *whole question*'[29]. Tyrrell held firmly that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ was unique, definitive, 'alone classical and normative'. Yet he was impatient too of the parochialism of Christianity, of 'its ridiculous little world-scheme and its funny little God, and above all its deplorable history'. He complained of Steinmann's *Die geistige Offenbarung Gottes in der geschicthlichen Perzon Jesu* (1903) that it was 'too Christocentric and makes a knowledge of the historical Christ a condition of the fullest religious life. I cannot swallow that'[30]. The clue to this apparent contradiction, puzzling in the light of the relentless Christocentrism of Tyrrell's own writings, lies in the immanentism of Tyrrell's thought about the religious faculty itself. For him all man's religious activity was the work of the indwelling Logos, and therefore in some sense a faculty natural to all men. External revelation is recognised and appropriated by 'a revelation in ourselves which is the action of conscience . . . Were it not already written in the depths of our being, where the spirit is rooted in God, we could not recognise it'[31]. This immanentism was a constant feature of Tyrrell's thought; von Hugel had noted and praised it as early as 1899. As Tyrrell became less convinced of the viability of his vision of a renewed Catholicism it fed his conviction that Christianity itself might be provisional. He began to search for a theory which would relate the historical particularity of Christ and Christianity to a general theory of religion, wider even than Catholicism and into which he could envisage Catholicism dying. For Catholicism to him was more than Christianity, it was not merely 'the leaves of the Gospel, but .... all that has been or is in process of being leavened by it' not a name merely for 'the fire, but for all that it has set burning.' Yet he was increasingly doubtful about the possibility of a reconciliation between this wider view and existing forms of Christianity. 'Modernism', he told an Anglican friend in January 1909, 'is a defiance of the parable. "The bottles will burst" says Christ. "They will not burst" says the modernist. The best way to keep the old bottles is to stick to the old wine . . . My own work, which I regard as finished, has been to raise a question which I have failed to answer'[32].

His work was not finished; his wrestling with the relation of Christianity to religion in general had forced upon him the question which dominated the liberal protestant theology of his day.

What *was* Christianity? He was certain of the inadequacy of the liberal protestant answer to that question, and fearful that his own past work was itself based on liberal protestant assumptions. On April 9th 1909 he wrote to von Hugel.

> Having finished Schweitzer and reread J. Weiss very carefully .... I am satisfied that the liberal Protestant Sunday-School-teacher Christ is as mythical as the miraculous Christ .... But I feel that my past work has been dominated by the liberal Protestant Christ and doubt whether I am not bankrupt .... If we cannot save huge chunks of Transcendentalism Christianity must go. Civilisation can do (and has done) all that the purely immanentist Christ of Matthew Arnold is credited with. The other-worldly emphasis, the doctrine of immortality, was what gave Christianity its original impulse and sent martyrs to the lions. If that is accidental we only owe to Jesus in a great measure what we owe to all good men in some measure. In the sense of survival, immortality, the Resurrection is the critical and central dogma[33].

Tyrrell believed his own writing tainted with liberal protestantism because in his concern to separate the permanent in Christianity from the contingent, to discover what Harnack had called 'Eternal life in the midst of Time' he had portrayed Christ as incarnate conscience, and dogma as a prophetic guide to conduct. He had been aware of the danger of this emphasis—'I find something frigidly Anglican and respectable in Matthew Arnold's Righteousness as the characteristic of the divinity', he once wrote, 'It is a bloodless sort of attribute, and so comprehensible, even when qualified by "eternal", as to starve the mystical sense ... God must be righteous, but he must be more.' He had tried in *Lex Credendi* to present an account of Christianity that made allowance for the transcendent and mystical in religion, but he had not yet come to terms with the scandal of particularity, with the historical Jesus, who, 'even should our Christologies be blown to atoms by the damned critics' retained his mystery[34].

In his last work, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads*, published posthumously in 1909, Tyrrell reworked the whole modernist controversy, gathering together into what he sensed to be a final synthesis the results of his work of the previous ten years. In it he attempted to tackle the problem of Christianity's relation to world religions, to distinguish the modernist enterprise from liberal protestantism, and above all to come to terms with the historical Jesus and his abiding significance. A book which set out to summarise the work of ten years cannot be adequately summarised in a paragraph or two, but Tyrrell's fundamental point is simple enough. He argues that 'with all its accretions and perversions Catholicism is, for the Modernist, the only authentic Christianity. Whatever Jesus was, He was in no sense a Liberal Protestant. All that makes Catholicism most repugnant to present modes of thought derives from Him.'[35] Christianity according to Liberal Protestantism is 'rather a system of religious ethics than a religion', but in the apocalyptic orientation of Jesus' teaching, revealed by Weiss and Schweitzer, ethics play a secondary role—'if ... the religion of Jesus was not exclusively transcendental, its emphasis was almost entirely on the other world.... And this transcendentalism is the great reproach made against Catholicism by the Liberal Protestant, as well as by the Positivist'[36]. Harnack and his school had praised the moral teaching of Jesus, while rejecting the 'supernatural' conceptual system in which it took its place as a product of a Jewish first century mentality, of no permanent value. Tyrrell challenges this: 'Is it credible that the purest of all hearts should not have seen God; that it should have been the prey to a sort of religious delirium? Is it possible to trust the moral, and distrust the religious, intuition of Jesus?'[37]. The religious, transcendental teaching of Jesus, and in particular its apocalyptic expression, is true to the essential tragedy of man, his sense of exile in a world of sin and suffering, his restless search for God; these emphases are faithfully reflected in Catholicism, are absent from liberal Protestantism, with its 'bland faith and hope in the present order, its refusal to face the incurable tragedy of human life'[38]. So far Tyrrell's argument is essentially that of Loisy in *L'Evangile et L'Eglise*, though incomparably more passionately and religiously expressed. In the second part of his book he examines the place of Christianity in the wider spectrum of world religion, and considers the possibility of an 'universal religion' which would embody the insights of all the great religions.

Tyrrell considers the possibility that the study of religions, anthropology and psychology might provide a 'science of religion' which would bring such a 'unification' of religion within our grasp. Here Tyrrell was reflecting contemporary optimism about the benefits of religious unification, the same optimism which had helped bring about the World Parliament of Religions a few years before at Chicago. Yet it is worth noting that he attacked any idea that such a 'unification' could be achieved by a synthesis of the great religions, the tendency 'to search for some one or two truths in which all religions agree, and to make this the essence of religion, regarding all the rest, not as development, but as mere accretion'. This was 'to declare the historical religious process mere waste.' What remains when religion is 'purified' of all doctrinal and religious accretions is 'a mere sentiment. . . . We are to ask, seek and knock, but never to find, receive or enter. We are to feel the significance of life; we must not dare to say what it signifies.' Any true 'unification' of religion can only come from the assimilation of the genuine insights of other religions into an existing catholicism, their incorporation into a definite and coherent religious body which is yet rich and various enough to assimilate a variety of religious insights and forms. Such a religion is 'Catholic Christianity, which is more nearly a microcosm of the world of religions than any other known form' [39].

Finally, Tyrrell turns to consider the person of Christ, and his place in man's religious quest. Jesus was no mere prophet or teacher, and Christianity is no mere *Imitatio Christi*. 'He was not a prophet speaking in the name of the Spirit, but the Spirit itself in human form', the 'Divine indwelling and saving Spirit', 'a fire kindling from soul to soul down the long centuries', Himself 'the revelation of God . . . communicating not His ideas or His doctrines, but His very self . . . through the sacramental power of the Gospel and the Church'. Jesus was 'the incarnation of conscience. He did not merely possess, but *was* personally the indwelling Logos . . .', and therefore 'all who are saved are saved through Christ . . . Christianity has but brought the universal principle of salvation to its highest degree of force and explicitness'[40].

Opinions will vary about the success of Tyrrell's attempt to effect a synthesis of his previous writings, of the findings of modern criticism, and of religious psychology. Certain elements in the synthesis have worn rather badly. It does not now seem very likely that 'a relatively universal and permanent religion' could be constructed out of 'the laws and uniformities revealed by a comparative study of religions and a study of religious psychology'. Such a notion bears very much the stamp of the period which produced it, of Madame Blavatsky and of the Society for Psychical Research. Yet what is notable about Tyrrell's proposal for such a 'greater catholicism' is his rejection of 'unitive' religion, his emphasis on the integrity of the great religions and the impossibility of any syncretistic 'Budchrinduism'. In fact, if examined carefully his proposal amounts to little more than the absorption of insights from other religions by a renewed and purified Catholicism, and it is significant that his chapter on Christology follows that on universal religion. That Christology, too, is one of the book's weaknesses, for its insistence that Jesus was 'simply the incarnation of conscience, the manifestation of that ideal humanity which conscience is striving to reveal and realise in every human soul' brings him perilously close to that 'moralistic' view of Jesus which he condemned in Matthew Arnold and Adolf von Harnack.

Tyrrell was not a great theologian; his aim in all his writing was pastoral, to formulate a Catholicism on which devotion might feed without the sacrifice of intellect. His fundamental insight can be summed up in very little space 'Theology is human, Revelation Divine'. The Church was the place where both occurred. 'It is within the Church where the experiences of so many peoples and so many centuries are united and compressed and forced into harmony, that the Gospel Spirit seeks experimentally to embody itself in the best form of external religious institution. Catholicism is neither the unchanging spirit nor the growing organisation, but the two together'[41]. This is not very revolutionary, not even very modern. Indeed, it could be argued that it does not proceed very far beyond the pietistic emphases of so traditional a work as Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. That most anti-theological of writings, with its declaration that 'I had rather feel compunction than know the definition of it', its contrast between 'the word of truth' and quibblings

about 'genera and species', is never far from Tyrrell's mind, his letters and published works are littered with references to it, and in 1905 he wrote that 'I fall back more and more on a Kempis as . . . the wisest reading of life and the best comforter in trouble'[42]. His distinction between theology and devotion is to be found in the prayer of the disciple in book III cap. 2, a passage he used himself and prescribed to penitents[43].

Tyrrell once said that he wrote 'for a small circle of readers, those who belong to three generations ahead'. Three generations later his thought seems in places obscure, in places curiously dated. Yet to read him is to encounter a passionate and devout intelligence, a bracing complex of iconoclasm and reverence wrestling to reconcile *Nova et vetera*, things new and old. For all its weaknesses his work escapes the easy complacency which disfigures and renders unreadable so much of the theological writing of the period before the Great War, and if his belief in the birth of a new Catholicism reflected the optimism of his age, it has in part been justified. Above all, for all his 'Modernism' he never succumbed to the tendency of his age, and of ours, to trim the gospel to the 'temper of the day', when 'Immortality is thrust into the background' and 'Christian civilisation takes the place of the kingdom of God, and morality, that of eternal life', when 'the churches chatter progress, and the secular and clerical arms are linked together in the interests of a sanctified worldliness'[44]. That is a tone of voice unusual in his day, and worth listening to in our own.

NOTES

1 M. Petre *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell* (London 1912) vol. I pp.59-64.
2 The chapel of St Etheldreda was a crypt chapel—hence the darkness and the reference to the catacombs.
3 *Autobiography* II, pp.97-153.
4 'Catholic' and 'Roman Catholic' have been treated as synonyms throughout for the sake of brevity.
5 *Autobiography* II. 95.
6 Maisie Ward, *Insurrection versus Resurrection* (London 1937) 554.
7 *Autobiography* II.95.
8 A. Vidler, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* (Cambridge 1970) 117-8.
9 M.D. Petre, *Von Hugel and Tyrrell* (London 1937) 118
10 George Tyrrell, *The Faith of the Millions* (London 1901) I.190.
11 George Tyrrell, *Through Scylla and Charybdis* (London 1907) p. 85.
12 *Faith of the Millions* I.228-252.
13 *ibid*.I.115-135.
14 M.D. Petre, *George Tyrrell's Letters* (London 1920) 3-8, George Tyrrell, *Medievalism* (London 1909) 107-8.
15 British Library Additional Ms. 43680. Tyrrell to A.L. Waller, 21.iv.1904.
16 George Tyrrell, *Oil and Wine* (London 1907) 229.
17 B.L. Add. Ms. 44927-31 contain Tyrrell's correspondence with von Hugel. I have cited letters simply by date, since their chronological arrangement makes the location of individual items easy. Tyrrell to von Hugel, 14.x.1902; *Von Hugel and Tyrrell* p. 117.
18 George Tyrrell, *Lex Orandi, or Prayer and Creed* (London 1903) 46-64, 164-179.
19 George Tyrrell, *Lex Credendi* (London 1906).
20 *Letters* 22.
21 *Letters* 89-91; *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 6.iii.1904.
22 *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 30.ix.1904.
23 *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 25.i.1903.
24 See on this Ward, *Insurrection versus Resurrection* 165-171, *Autobiography* II.207-223; *Through Scylla and Charybdis* 106-154.
25 *Lex Credendi* 159.
26 *ibid* 143.
27 *Through Scylla and Charybdis* 11.
28 *ibid* 232-7.
29 *B.L.* Tyrrell to von Hugel 11.i.1903
30 *Letters* 25
31 *Through Scylla and Charybdis* 264 - 307
32 *Letters* 119
33 *B.L.* Tyrrell to Von Hugel 9.iv.1909.
34 *Letters* 163.
35 George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London 1909) xxi.
36 *ibid* 66-7.
37 *ibid* 98-9.
38 *ibid* 127.
39 *ibid* 229-260.
40 *ibid* 261-273.
41 *Medievalism* 129, 179.
42 *Letters* 273.
43 *Letters* 257.
44 *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* 156-7.