

**THE CATHOLIC CONCEPTION OF  
THE CHURCH: A STUDY OF THE  
TRADITIONAL IDEA OF THE  
NATURE AND CONSTITUTION OF  
THE CHURCH**

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The catholic conception of the church: a study of the traditional idea of the nature and constitution of the church by W. J. Sparrow Simpson

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# Library of Historic Theology

EDITED BY THE REV. WM. C. PIERCY, M.A.

DEAN AND CHAPLAIN OF WHITELANDS COLLEGE

## THE CATHOLIC CONCEPTION OF THE CHURCH

W. J. SPARROW SIMPSON, D.D.

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BY

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## EDITOR'S GENERAL PREFACE

**I**N no branch of human knowledge has there been a more lively increase of the spirit of research during the past few years than in the study of Theology.

Many points of doctrine have been passing afresh through the crucible; "re-statement" is a popular cry and, in some directions, a real requirement of the age; the additions to our actual materials, both as regards ancient manuscripts and archaeological discoveries, have never before been so great as in recent years; linguistic knowledge has advanced with the fuller possibilities provided by the constant addition of more data for comparative study; cuneiform inscriptions have been deciphered, and forgotten peoples, records, and even tongues, revealed anew as the outcome of diligent, skilful and devoted study.

Scholars have specialized to so great an extent that many conclusions are less speculative than they were, while many more aids are thus available for arriving at a general judgment; and, in some directions at least, the time for drawing such general conclusions, and so making practical use of such specialized research, seems to have come, or to be close at hand.

Many people, therefore, including the large mass of the parochial clergy and students, desire to have in an accessible form a review of the results of this flood of new light on many topics that are of living and vital interest to the Faith; and, at the same time, "practical" questions—by which is really denoted merely the application of faith to life and to the needs of the day—have certainly lost none of their interest, but rather loom larger than ever if the Church is adequately to fulfil her Mission.

It thus seems an appropriate time for the issue of a new series of theological works, which shall aim at presenting a *general survey* of the present position of thought and knowledge in various branches of the wide field which is included in the study of divinity.



The Library of Historic Theology is designed to supply such a series, written by men of known reputation as thinkers and scholars, teachers and divines, who are, one and all, firm upholders of the Faith.

It will not deal merely with doctrinal subjects, though prominence will be given to these; but great importance will be attached also to history—the sure foundation of all progressive knowledge—and even the more strictly doctrinal subjects will be largely dealt with from this point of view, a point of view the value of which in regard to the “practical” subjects is too obvious to need emphasis.

It would be clearly outside the scope of this series to deal with individual books of the Bible or of later Christian writings, with the lives of individuals, or with merely minor (and often highly controversial) points of Church governance, except in so far as these come into the general review of the situation. This detailed study, invaluable as it is, is already abundant in many series of commentaries, texts, biographies, dictionaries and monographs, and would overload far too heavily such a series as the present.

The Editor desires it to be distinctly understood that the various contributors to the series have no responsibility whatsoever for the conclusions or particular views expressed in any volumes other than their own, and that he himself has not felt that it comes within the scope of an editor's work, in a series of this kind, to interfere with the personal views of the writers. He must therefore, leave to them their full responsibility for their own conclusions.

Shades of opinion and differences of judgment must exist, if thought is not to be at a standstill—petrified into an unproductive fossil; but while neither the Editor nor all their readers can be expected to agree with every point of view in the details of the discussions in all these volumes, he is convinced that the great principles which lie behind every volume are such as must conduce to the strengthening of the Faith and to the glory of God.

That this may be so is the one desire of Editor and contributors alike.

W. C. P.

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO trace within the pages of one volume the course of the Catholic Conception of the Church through a development of 1900 years is only possible by a process of condensation, and by presenting results rather than details. There are many matters of great importance whose inclusion the requirements of space would not permit. A selection only has been made among the great writers of the primitive Church. It has been thought advisable to dwell at considerable length upon a few leading examples rather than to multiply instances, and treat them with less fullness.

The evidence of the earlier centuries has been fully given and discussed in Batiffol's very valuable volume *L'Eglise Naissante*, which has been translated into English under the title of Primitive Catholicism.

