

**SOURCES OF THE APOSTOLIC  
CANONS; WITH A TREATISE ON  
THE ORIGIN OF THE READERSHIP  
AND OTHER LOWER ORDERS**

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Sources of the Apostolic canons; with a treatise on the origin of the readership and other lower orders by Adolf Harnack & John Owen

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OF THE  
APOSTOLIC CANONS

WITH A TREATISE ON  
THE ORIGIN OF THE READERSHIP AND OTHER  
LOWER ORDERS

By PROFESSOR ADOLF HARNACK  
(TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN)

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON  
THE ORGANISATION OF THE EARLY CHURCH  
AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE READER

By THE REV. JOHN OWEN

AUTHOR OF 'EVENINGS WITH THE SKEPTIC'  
'THE SKEPTICS OF THE ITALIAN AND FRENCH RENAISSANCE'  
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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THERE is no need of apology in bringing before our readers a work of Professor Harnack's. His fame is now in 'all the Churches,' and by his writings a great light has been thrown on early Church History. In the German title the expression 'so-called' occurs; this I have omitted, as I can hardly imagine that any one will think that by using the phrase 'Apostolic Canons' I believe them to be of Apostolic origin. Dr. Harnack in the present work gives little attention to them, referring his readers to his edition of the *Didaché*. This work was out of print at the time our translation was made, so it was considered necessary to have some introduction, and the Rev. John Owen kindly consented to write one. I regret that his continued ill-health, which all must deplore, prevented his accomplishment of the task until now.

I take this opportunity to sincerely thank Mr. Frederic Norgate and Mr. Archibald Constable for much assistance and advice.

L. A. W.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON  
THE ORGANISATION OF THE EARLY CHURCH  
AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE READER

## INTRODUCTION

If it were required to describe in one word, cumulative and comprehensive, the prevailing and characteristic energy of the nineteenth century, it would be difficult to find a better or more descriptive term than *Disintegration*. Every human institution, political or religious; every scheme of thought, philosophical, theological, or scientific; every fabric of long-accredited belief, or tradition; whatever product of human reason or practical exigency, in short, that can claim apparently or really characteristics of growth and fixity, has either undergone or is in process of undergoing the most searching investigation and vivisection. These solvent energies are, of course, of the most diversified kind. Heterogeneous in origin and object, they differ no less in modes of application. Where they chiefly resemble each other is in sharing a kind of mutual affinity—a contagiousness of opportunity—by means of which activities of varying kinds seem dominated by a concurrence, more or less accidental and unaccountable, of times and seasons.

Now it is obvious that disintegration must have been preceded by a prior process—that of integration: the accretion and gradual consolidation of the varying elements and materials which resulted in the ultimate formation. It is not less obvious that this integration may—nay in some cases must—have been a long and protracted process; that, like certain geological processes—*e.g.*, the accumulation of globigerina

ooze in the bed of the Atlantic—human growths and beliefs of a certain type have taken centuries for their evolution and formation. This fact has, it is needless to observe, an important bearing on subsequent processes of disintegration and analysis. Not unfrequently integration implies stagnation. It may even mean the plethora which betokens and announces *disease*. The fabric which it has taken centuries to build may be constructed, at least in part, of the hay, stubble, and other facile but unworthy materials which go to the formation of so many human erections. Besides, disintegration does not necessarily imply destruction. It may mean only reconstruction. Probably there have been few movements in human history—few examples, *i.e.*, of disintegration and reintegration—in which what seemed the best and most durable materials of the old dismantled and demolished structure have not been utilised for the new building.

Confining our attention to special forms and directions of this disintegrating energy we note its activity and extreme importance in two departments of human inquiry.

1. It is impossible not to be struck by the disintegration—the relaxing of cohesive elements and ties of all kinds—which has manifested itself in Christian theology,—I mean *the accredited and traditional body of Christian doctrine and belief* which has obtained in most Christian churches since the time of the Reformation.

2. Allied with this, yet only partially dependent upon it, has been the corresponding upheaval in traditional and commonly accepted beliefs as to *the organisation of the early church*. This has been so great as to create almost a reversal of the ecclesiastical theory once current among all the great churches of Christendom.