

**THE GOSPEL AND
THE CHURCH. [NEW
YORK-1909]**

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The Gospel and the Church. [New York-1909] by Alfred Loisy & Christopher Home & Newman Smyth

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ALFRED LOISY & CHRISTOPHER HOME & NEWMAN SMYTH

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THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH

BY
ALFRED LOISY

TRANSLATED BY
CHRISTOPHER HOME

NEW EDITION, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
REV. NEWMAN SMYTH, D.D.

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1909

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INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW EDITION

PROFESSOR HARNACK's famous volume of lectures, *What is Christianity?* and the Abbé Loisy's epoch-making book, *The Gospel and the Church*, serve to mark on opposite sides the progress of modern theological thought. Both in their similarities and by their contrasts these two books may help an inquirer find his way amid the confusions of new biblical investigations to clearer appreciations of the origins and values of Christian institutions and beliefs. The two conceptions of Christianity which are presented in these volumes confront each other like separate cliffs; if one takes his stand at the top of either of them he will find no bridge across to the other; but if he follows the way which runs between them at the bottom, he will be led out to a larger conception of Christianity in which their separation disappears. Fundamentally, the revolt of Harnack from received Protestant dogmatism, and the protest of Loisy against official Romanism, have, more than at first may appear, a common ground in historical Christianity.

The first of these books represents a natural and necessary development of free, rational Protestant thinking. It is a legitimate fruit in its season of the Reformation. The other volume represents a necessary and vital adaptation of Roman Catholic belief to the conditions of modern thought. It is a natural development in its season of Catholic tradition. In this respect the two are alike; they are modern interpretations of the primitive faith. Harnack is a thoroughly trained historian; so also is Loisy. Both pursue with scientific sincerity the methods of modern critical research. They resemble one another also, while they differ, in the effort to determine what is essential by what is vital in Christianity. But at this point their divergence begins. Harnack will extract from the Gospels their essential truth, and that truth, as it is realized in the experience of the soul, is the essence of Christianity. Other elements, however closely related to it or historically added to it, do not constitute Christianity what it is in the life of the soul. Loisy, on the contrary, follows the historical development of Christianity as an organic whole, and throughout the continuous Christian tradition he seeks to discover the vitalizing and formative principles of its development. To Loisy dogma, government, institutional forms, and rites of worship are not adventitious

accretions, they are necessary growths of religion; they had to be in order that Christianity might continue to live.

Some similarity, likewise, may be noticed in the reception which these two representative books received. Harnack's volume called forth a storm of replies from orthodox quarters; Loisy's book brought down upon him the condemnation of the Congregations of the Index and the Holy Inquisition. The principle of the opposition in both cases is much the same. It is authority against criticism; received dogma or official tradition against historical scholarship. The difference is not so much in the attempt to exercise authority, but in the kind of authority to which appeal is made. In the Protestant reduction of Divine revelation to a system of theology, authority rests upon a written code; its law book is the Scriptures; and the judge of the law is reason, ultimately the reason of the individual teacher, but ecclesiastically the received interpretation of a particular Church. Harnack met with disapproval from many Protestant theologians, not because he endeavored to distil from historical Christianity its doctrinal essence, but because in the process of distillation he allowed many elements to evaporate which they regard as essential elements of the true faith. Loisy is condemned by the Roman Curia, not

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because he maintains that Christianity is a social fact to be known in its whole historical development, but because he could not submit to the claim of the Pope to sole supremacy in the teaching Church. Moreover, notwithstanding the differences, the defense in each case is fundamentally the same. Harnack falls back upon religious experience; for him dogma was made for faith, and not faith for dogma; the religious experience of the Christian man is lord of his beliefs. For Loisy, the life of the whole Christian society, continuous throughout the history of the Church, is always more than the institutional forms of it; the life is lord of its historical symbols. The final appeal, alike for the liberal Protestant theologian and for the progressive Roman Catholic, must be, not to the individual reason merely divorced from history, nor to tradition alone uninterpreted by reason; the highest court of Christian appeal is the collective experience of the Christ in the thought and life of the world until he comes. By the witness of the Christ after the Spirit and in the life of man, all that claims to be Christian is to be tried and judged. He said of his words, "They are spirit and they are life." In this common law of Christianity of the Spirit and the Life, there is secured, as could be done by no law of the letter, both historical continuity and personal initiative, both organic direc-