

Recent Foreign Theology.

Loisy on the Pope and the Gospels.¹

SIMULTANEOUSLY with his two large volumes on the Synoptic Gospels, Loisy has issued a small book of comments upon the Papal Encyclica. As a rule it is better to keep Biblical criticism apart from ecclesiastical discussions. But sometimes the two cross one another, and in this case they do. The *Simple Réflexions* are a severe, persistent, but courteous exposure of the Papal logic, or rather of the critical ignorance shown by the Italian clique who seem to have captured the present Pontiff. Loisy has an easy task in showing that this ignorance is mainly due to party prejudice.² Whether the Papal policy is right or wrong, it is impossible to deny that its printed reasons exhibit an extraordinary confusion of ideas. It would have been wiser to pronounce sentence on the Modernists, and give no reasons for the judgment, if the Encyclica is the best that the Roman agitators can produce. The Papal managers may be presumed, of course, to know their own business best. They have to run an organization, and that seems to require an ethical code of its own. But, as Loisy points out, while a reactionary policy may score for the moment, it is more than doubtful if its gains in the long run will equal the serious losses which are inevitable. The *Simple Réflexions*, with their irony and analytic severity, form a very damaging indictment of the Papal outburst. Here the honours are with Loisy easily.

The Papal criticism of Loisy, however, acquires a different aspect when it is set side by side with Loisy's pair of trenchant volumes upon the criticism of the Synoptic Gospels. With all respect to the distinguished author, who commands the sympathy of many outside his own Church for the

¹ *Simple Réflexions sur le Décret du Saint-Office Lamentabili sane Exitu et sur L'Encyclique Pascendi Dominici Gregis.* Alfred Loisy, 1908. *Les Évangiles Synoptiques*, i. 1907, ii. 1908. Pp. 1014, 818. Both chez L'auteur. Ceffonds, Près Montier-en-der (Haute-Marne).

² 'Mais si votre Sainteté avait le droit de les excommunier, elle n'aurait pas pour cela le droit de les insulter. Ces hommes que vous déclarez si orgueilleux, Très Sainte-Père, les connaissez-vous?' (p. 251).

way in which he has been treated, it seems to an outsider extremely difficult to see how the Curia could permit critical opinions of this kind to be published by an accredited teacher of the Church which has the Council of Trent fastened upon its neck. I do not wish to dwell on this point, however. My business in these columns is to indicate the general attitude of Loisy to the Synoptic problem. The introduction (vol. i. pp. 3-275), which determines the subsequent commentary, contains little or nothing that is unfamiliar to students of modern criticism. But its results hardly correspond to recent movements. Mark is regarded as a redactor's version, after 70 A.D., of an earlier source which was composed, perhaps, in Aramaic at Jerusalem, but the redactor has added a number of legendary sections, including (one is astonished at this time of day to hear) passages like the healing of the blind man at Jericho, the whole of 15⁴⁰-16⁸, and even the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas ('une fiction apologétique'). More than this, an intermediate redaction has incorporated passages like the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus, the Miracle of the loaves, and the Transfiguration. Why such primitive stories must be separated from the original source, Loisy has failed to show. His criteria are too *à priori* to win assent. Matthew was composed *circa* 100 A.D., about twenty-five years later than Mark, by a Jewish Christian (not of Palestine) who had strong ecclesiastical leanings, and who, like the editor of Mark, used a Greek version of the Logia. The latter was composed in the seventh decade by some disciple of the apostles. Loisy will not accept Matthew the tax-gatherer as the certain author even of this source, and he is quite unmoved by Harnack's work on Luke. To him the third Gospel, written between 90 and 100, cannot have come from a disciple of Paul. In a word, the origin of the Gospels is pushed further down, and their genetic relations rendered somewhat more complex, than one would have expected. But this is bound up with the longer interval required for the varied development of legend which enters powerfully into Loisy's inner criticism of the documents. While his standpoint on the date and period is, upon the whole, rather retrograde, the exegesis which flows from it

corresponds in method to that of Holtzmann's edition in the *Hand-Commentar*, and in spirit to the allegorizing process from which recent criticism has been slowly emerging. To prove this would require many pages. One instance only need be given. Thus, in discussing the story of the storm (Mk 4³⁵⁻⁴¹, and parallels), Loisy quotes Tertullian's interpretation of the boat as the Church, and then adds: 'Il y a déjà quelque chose de cette interprétation allégorique dans l'esprit même de la narration, et sans doute aussi dans la pensée des évangélistes; mais, si l'on peut soupçonner quelque arrangement dans le tableau, la vraisemblance des traits principaux et le lieu qui rattachait ce fait au suivant dans la tradition primitive ne permettent guère d'en contester l'historicité substantielle' (i. 798). Now, it is just this *substantielle* which invites inquiry. Here the higher criticism of the Gospels has to face its task. Loisy's method seems in some lines analogous to that of Dr. E. A. Abbott in his *Diatessarica*, and it would have been a real service had the French scholar found space within his commentary for a running estimate of the linguistic processes by which Dr. Abbott seeks to trace the evolution of stories¹ in the Gospels from misunderstood metaphor, and of variant versions from variant renderings of an original in Hebrew. Loisy knows Dr. Abbott's article on the Gospels, but he seems ignorant of the author's subsequent volumes. An examination of their contents would have been as much to the point as the frequent allusions to Wellhausen and Weiss—against whom, by the way, the French scholar makes some sound points.

Upon the historical value of the Gospels Loisy is quite frank. He approximates upon the whole to Brandt² more than most recent critics of his school, and it is on this evaporation of the historical nucleus of the faith that the most serious criticism of his work will probably converge—criticism not only from the side of historical research, but from that of the Church. To the Protestant reader, the main historical value of Christ for Loisy appears to be that without Him

the Roman Church could not have got under way. The Roman Catholic will naturally feel that such a Church, deprived of her ancestral titles in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, is hardly worth having and hardly capable of explanation. Apart from this line of objection, one feels that repeatedly a narrative or a saying in the *mise en scène* (a favourite term of Loisy's) is explained upon historical principles which are never clearly stated. No categories are stated which enable one to verify the proofs or check the statements. It is not that Loisy has no reasons. He has plenty, drawn from his own researches and from the pages of Jülicher, Holtzmann, and the rest.³ But one misses a coherent attitude on the part of the writer to the whole question of the relation between faith and history in the intellectual consciousness of the primitive Church, and at the same time one notes with disappointment a hyper-scepticism of tradition. The latter is remarkable and not very reassuring, in view of recent developments not only in Biblical but in classical criticism.

The equipment of these volumes in the matter of scholarship is thoroughly competent. Section after section is discussed with a patient, minute analysis of the contents and a comparative estimate of the Synoptic parallels. The style is, as usual, lucid; many paragraphs are crowded with suggestiveness; and the tone is invariably calm. These pages evidently gather up the results of many years spent by the author upon the study of the Synoptic Gospels, and, if they run often contrary to ordinary opinions, he would probably reply, with another French thinker, that he had not risen at four in the morning for twenty years in order to think like his neighbours. What place these volumes will ultimately hold in the literature of this subject, it is not easy to predict. I doubt if they will rank as high as Holtzmann's compact monographs, for example, or if their impact upon New Testament criticism will be as marked as that of B. Weiss's volumes. They scarcely inaugurate a fresh departure in the subject, like Wellhausen's editions. On the contrary, they sum up with admirable fulness a method of research which may be said to have almost seen its best

¹ The case of the withered fig-tree is one of the clearest examples of this, as Loisy readily shows (ii. pp. 282 f.). But he is too prone to find in the stories the allegorical elements which he refuses to see in the parables.

² E.g. the resurrection narrative, 'interprétés sans critique, ne sont qu'un tissu d'énigmes et de contradictions' (ii. 782).

³ It is refreshing to find Loisy (i. 298 f.), like Leipoldt (*Geschichte der neutest. Kanons*, i. p. 115), recognizing that the Magnificat was spoken by Elizabeth. The discussion of Mk 13 (= Mt 24-25), in vol. ii. pp. 393 f., strikes one as being one of the most closely argued sections in the whole treatise.

days.¹ Loisy's ship of criticism is bravely dressed with flags and gallantly manned, *velis et remis*; but

¹ I refer not only to the ultra-literary character of the method, but to its undue reliance upon tendency. Thus Mk 8³⁸ is surely intelligible without Paulinism (ii. 17 f.). Why should this saying be 'conformed to the spirit of Paul'? Or, for the matter of that, Mk 8³⁶? Loisy goes even further. He makes Paulinism responsible for the introduction of 'This is My Body,' 'This is My Blood,' in the Synoptic account of the Supper, in order to convert the

she is letting in water at several seams already, and it looks doubtful to the spectator if she will manage to keep afloat.

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latter into a eucharistic rite of redemption (i. 181). The emphasis put by Mark on the disciples' ignorance is also run back to a Pauline apologetic, which indirectly defends the apostle's doctrine and rôle by depreciating the original disciples!

Saintly Miracles.

A STUDY IN COMPARATIVE HAGIOLOGY.

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FULLER, in his *English Worthies*, speaks bitterly of the 'want of honest hearts in those biographists of saints who betrayed their pens to such abominable untruths' as the long catalogue of miracles which they relate. It is true the Lives of the Saints bristle with the Supernatural. In many cases the accounts of these miracles are the result of invention pure and simple. In other cases they are due to the credulity of an uncritical age which found it absolutely impossible to distinguish between true and false where the vast field of religion was concerned. Some are direct imitations of the miracles of our Lord, with this difference that the saint usually performed far more of any particular kind of miracle, while the circumstances of each miracle were more supernatural, so to say, than any in the pages of the New Testament. But taking the vast body of miracles in the *Acta Sanctorum* and kindred writings, we are immediately struck with the fact that *mutatis mutandis* they are precisely similar to the miracles attributed to Mohammedan, Buddhist, or Hindu saints, to the marvels ascribed to pagan priests, shamans, sorcerers, or to savage medicine-men all over the world and in all ages, or to certain psychical phenomena confined to no age or country. If there is any value in the dictum *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, then these miracles ought to be believed, for there is none of them to which abundant parallels extending to the minutest details, could not be found in these different regions. What seems to be the case is this. Mankind, on certain mental

planes, have everywhere believed that almost anything in the shape of the miraculous might happen. They freely ascribed such marvels to ancestors in far-off times, as will be found by studying the myths of any savage or barbarous people. Within limits, each man claimed to have such powers himself. But they were most abundantly credited to the specialist in magic or the miraculous—to the medicine-man or sorcerer, to the man who was the intermediary between men and the gods, the priest or the professional holy person, or the saint. The human mind in its credulous stage everywhere believed in a more or less definite body of miraculous or supernatural actions. It also believed that certain persons had the power of performing them. Whenever such a person came prominently before his fellows, it was the easiest thing in the world to believe that he not only could but did perform such things. To such a mental attitude must be ascribed many of the miracles found in the lives of the saints. The floating mass of miraculous acts or any part of it as easily was attracted to their biographies, oral or written, as is a mellow chestnut to the personality of eminent personages in every successive generation. Thus the element of fraud in the case of saintly miracles must be largely discounted. There was no 'intent to deceive,' only an inevitable mental attitude of universal credulity, shared by Australian, Polynesian, Hindu, Arab, mediæval Christian, seventeenth-century Protestant, and a host of others.