

HARNACK AND LOISY ON THE ESSENCE OF  
CHRISTIANITY.

SELDOM can two books on such a small scale as *Das Wesen des Christentums* and *L'Évangile et l'Église* have produced such a sensation as the works of Harnack and Loisy published under these titles. Many things contributed to the sensation. Both the authors are men in the foremost rank of ability and learning. Both raise questions which go to the very heart of Christianity, and indeed of the spiritual life of the world. Both write, for the occasion at least, with singular vivacity. Both have raised a storm of protestation in their own churches, and have been answered, not by those to whom they spoke, but by official or self-constituted guardians of Christianity who evidently fear that between the learned disputants very little gospel is likely to be left. It gave an unexpected piquancy to Loisy's book that in answering Harnack he took up an attitude in some respects the very opposite of that which we should have looked for in a Roman Catholic scholar. He did not assail Harnack for being too critical, but for not being critical enough. He himself claims to be free where Harnack is bound. He is at liberty to be historical where Harnack is dogmatic. It is true, the authorities of his church have not supported his claim: but in his second little book, *Autour d'un petit livre*, he has asserted this liberty even in relation to them with refreshing frankness. Into the personalities of the situation, however, it is needless to enter; the real interest is that of the great question at issue—How are we to conceive and define the Christian religion?

The answers given by Harnack and Loisy to this question are conditioned in part by the intention of the writers. Each of them has in contemplation a particular audience.

Harnack delivered his sixteen lectures to students of all faculties in the University of Berlin, and he evidently conceives his hearers as standing aloof from traditional Christianity. They do not believe in miracles; the modern philosophy they have assimilated does not cohere with the traditional doctrines of the church; from all the institutions in which Christianity is embodied, they are more or less alienated. They do not (probably) go much to church, a sacrament is something for which their intellectual world has no place, the idea of a clergy is one for which they have a kind of moral loathing. Harnack's intention, with this audience before him, is to commend Christianity; it is to evangelize. It is to commend Christianity itself, as opposed to everything with which it has come to be identified in the course of its long and chequered history. There is such a thing as Christianity itself, in contrast to the marvels which have embellished it, the dogmas in which it has been intellectually construed, the organizations and institutions in which it has been legally embodied; and it is the very thing itself which Harnack in the true spirit of an evangelist wishes to exhibit anew to the mind and conscience of his hearers. It is this which gives his book its charm, and compels our sympathy even where we dissent from particular propositions of the author. It is not the religion of the gospel, Loisy says, it is Harnack's own religion. If this is a defect, it is also a merit. In its way, Harnack's book is the Christian confession of a strong man, and the Christian religion as he has experienced and understands it comes home with power to the reader.

But what is the Christian religion—what is Christianity itself—as Harnack preaches and expounds it? In his own words, it is Jesus Christ and His gospel. The question, What is Christianity? is a historical question, and it must receive a historical answer. For this answer Harnack goes back into history, yet not precisely to a moment in history.

It is not enough to present the figure of Jesus and the main features of His glad tidings; we should not really know Him if we did not know the impression He made on those who associated with Him. The way in which a great and effective personality tells upon others is one of the main ways in which it reveals what it is. While including in his conception of Christianity this reference to the effect produced by Jesus on those who knew Him, Harnack does not exaggerate the importance of the first forms in which Christianity was established among men. "The gospel," he says, "did not enter the world as a statutory religion, and therefore no form in which it has received intellectual or social definition, not even the first, can claim to be the classical and abiding phenomenon of it." But in spite of this limitation, in which he approaches very near to Loisy, Harnack does assign a decisive and final importance to something in the past. Jesus and His message, the life which He lived and the glad tidings which He preached, including the impression this made on others and the testimony they were consequently able to bear to Him: this is the essence of Christianity. This it is which never changes, because it is really independent of time and circumstances, and appeals to that which is timeless in man; this it is which is the criterion of all that claims to be Christian, a criterion the possession of which delivers us from all intellectual or moral bondage to what men have pronounced or practised as Christian; this it is which is the absolute in Christianity, a truly supernatural power which has been manifested in history, but by which we are lifted unequivocally, above historical chance and natural necessity alike, into an eternal life in God.

When Harnack proceeds to unfold the gospel as Jesus preached it he seems unable to reduce it to any precise definition. He states it in three alternative forms. It is

the glad tidings of the kingdom of God and its coming ; of God the Father and the infinite worth of the soul ; of the better righteousness and the commandment of love. Of these three it may be said that the first is that which is most obviously determined by historical antecedents and circumstances, and which is therefore in all probability the one least useful to an evangelist addressing men whose historical situation is quite different from that of Jesus' auditors ; and it is perhaps for this reason as well as others that the kingdom of God and its coming take really a very subordinate place in Harnack's representation of the gospel. The third, again, is apt to leave the impression that the gospel has to do with morality, not religion—in other words, that it is a law, not a gospel ; and with all his moral ardour, it is only by a kind of afterthought, in which he shows how the better righteousness and the law of love are dependent for their realization on humility, that is, on openness to the love of God, that Harnack can satisfy himself that his third description of the gospel is entitled to stand side by side with the other two. But between the first and the third the main emphasis all through his book falls on the second. God and the soul, the soul and its God—God as the Father, and the soul in its infinite value to Him and to itself ; these two, in their relations to one another, are the sum and substance of what we owe to Jesus and His gospel. Whoever holds these truths and lives in them holds the whole of Christianity. This is the eternal in it which never changes ; this is the criterion, the standard of reference, by which we must judge everything, and in the possession of which we may freely condemn much, which asserts a claim to be Christian. We are liberated at once by this conception from all that is dogmatic in the legal sense, and from all that is institutional, in Christianity. Canon, creed, church, clergy, Christology, we can lighten the ship by throwing them all overboard,

and put the gospel on a surer basis than before. We make it easier to become Christian, in the sense of removing many difficulties from the path—intellectual difficulties, that is, which bring the mind to a standstill, or provoke it to revolt; but not easier in reality, for nothing makes a greater demand on all that is within us than really to commit ourselves to the Living God, whose holiness and love are real to us through Christ, and to live as those who are infinitely dear to Him.

Loisy's intention is quite different from Harnack's, and gives a different moral quality to his book. He is not speaking as an evangelist, and commending Christianity as he understands it to a somewhat unsympathetic audience: he is speaking as a person who is identified with a great historical embodiment of Christianity, and who is interested to show that the fortunes of Jesus Christ and His gospel, as Harnack puts it, have been and are bound up with the fortune of what he calls the Church. He does not censure Harnack for being too historical in his apprehension of Christianity, but for not being historical enough. In the full sense of the term Christianity is a historical religion, and he is at pains to bring out the full sense. There is no absolute in history, nothing timeless. There is no moment which has the value of eternity; at every moment the historical reality is relative, and it is in process. You cannot find the timeless moment or the eternal worth even by going back to Jesus. Jesus lived in history, and was as truly of His time as we are of ours. Thus, to take one example, there is no absoluteness in *His* conceptions of the Kingdom of God, which would make them a law to us; and in short it is not by going back at all that we find the essence of Christianity. To go back is not to find the eternal in the historical; it is merely to petrify the past, and to deceive ourselves with words. When we say that Christianity is a historical religion—which is true—what

we ought to mean is that Christianity is the whole historical movement initiated by Jesus. There is such a movement, and everything in it is so far legitimated by being there. In order to subsist in the world at all Christianity had to become all that we see it to be. It had to develop dogmas, rites, institutions, devotions, disciplines; if it had not done so, it would have ceased to exist. Not the Church but *Christianity* would have ceased to exist. When it entered into the great world, the great world entered into it: why not? When people became Christians they brought their minds into Christianity, their habits of thought, to some extent their former modes of worship: and again Loisy would ask, Why not? The point to remember is that there is no *finality* here; it is a *process* which is going on before our eyes, and it is not to be judged as a *final result*; its legitimacy merely turns on the question whether the process is one in which the element of Christian tradition keeps a determining place, so that through the process men are really kept in communication with Christ. It is the generative action of His Spirit—though we cannot think of the Spirit as personal—and not the formal verification of His words or even His thoughts in the Christian community, which entitles it to bear His name.

It is not our business to discuss the reception which these ideas have found from the co-religionists of their author. We can easily understand that Roman Catholic authorities have been astonished by them. M. Loisy's defence of the Church has been only too thorough. He has proved too much, and he has done it at a tremendous cost. Christianity is the movement initiated in history by Jesus, and everything which has a place in this movement is *ipso facto* legitimate. The most extravagant "devotions," the most imbecile superstitions, the most incomprehensible dogmas, the most tyrannical disciplines, are all covered by this shield. They are all part of the movement initiated by Jesus; the gospel

has lived in that movement, and could not have lived in independence of it; and its sanction extends to all that the movement has carried with it. So far no Roman Catholic could have any quarrel with M. Loisy. But the seriousness of the situation appears when we ask what kind of legitimation the Church, with its rites, dogmas and discipline, obtains in this way? It is a purely historical legitimation. It has a right to be, because it is there; but it is there only because it is in motion, only because it is passing away. There is no such thing in it as an immutable dogma, or a constitution or a ritual which has divine right, and therefore can never be changed. Christology, the doctrine of grace, the doctrine of the Church and the Sacraments, all alike come under this law. They have a historical legitimacy, but it is only historical; their right to be can be frankly acknowledged because it is only a relative right, and implies the obligation sooner or later to cease to be. If their right were regarded as absolute or divine, it would not mean that Christianity had been apprehended as an eternal truth; it would mean that so far as history is concerned Christianity was dead.

In pointing out the bearings of this proposition, Loisy is probably concerned with his ecclesiastical superiors as much as with Harnack. It is his case against Harnack, but it is still more his case against them. Up till the present time, he says, Catholic theologians have been mainly preoccupied with the absolute character which dogma derives from its source, divine revelation; while critics have hardly seen anything but its relative character, as manifested in history. "What sound theology is bound to aim at is the solution of the antinomy presented by the absolute authority claimed by faith for dogma, and the variability and relativity which the critic cannot but remark in the history of dogmas and in the dogmatic formulae." The solution of the antinomy, he is not afraid

to hint, will lead to a lessening of the pressure of ecclesiastical authority in the Catholic Church. It might have been thought that the dogma of papal infallibility left no room for such mental discomfort as M. Loisy evidently feels, and that a Catholic, as Newman says at the end of the *Apologia*, can have no history of his religious opinions to narrate; but that is not Loisy's view. "The definitions of the Vatican," he says, "have disengaged themselves somehow from the reality"—which is a diplomatic way, presumably, of saying that they mark the stage reached in the development of Catholic Christianity, register the ecclesiastical *status quo*; "but if the centralizing movement which has led to this point seems to have reached its goal, theological reflection has not yet said its last word on the subject. With regard to the true nature and object of ecclesiastical authority, we may believe that the future will make observations which cannot fail to react on the mode and conditions of its exercise."

However this may be, the point of living interest in Loisy's conception is that which is suggested by the words quoted above—"the absolute character which dogma derives from its source, divine revelation." One's first impression is that in the name of history Loisy refuses to think about the absolute at all. To put it paradoxically, the only absolute he acknowledges is the absolute relativity of everything which has taken or can take a real place in history. Absolute and historical form a contradiction in terms. When Harnack speaks of the essence of Christianity as something independent of time and environment, or uses phrases like absolute religion, absolute Christianity, Loisy puts them ironically aside as describing entities that are not very likely to be found in history. Yet the absolute relativity of everything in history seems to leave us without any criterion whatever, either of Christianity or of truth; everything both is and is not, and whatever we can build



on this basis it is not religion. Religion is a form of the absolute consciousness, and perhaps the most remarkable passage in M. Loisy's work is one in which, after insisting on the historical relativity of *everything* Christian, he is driven to find the basis of Christianity, the revelation on which it rests, and its one absolute dogma, outside of history altogether. The passage in question is found on p. 267 f., in which M. Loisy is speaking of the worship of the Catholic Church: "Neither the worship of the Christ nor the worship of the saints could belong to the gospel of Jesus, nor do they belong to it; they arose spontaneously and grew up one after the other, then both together, in Christianity as it took shape or had already taken shape. Nevertheless the worship of Jesus and that of the saints proceed alike from what we might call in strict truth the primitive revelation, that which has never been articulated (*spécifiée*) in formal teaching, and which man bears written in indistinct characters at the bottom of his religious consciousness. The article which constitutes by itself this undefined (*inexpliquée*) revelation, and which Jesus manifested in His person and His life as much as in His teaching, but which he was the first to manifest in a clear and intelligible way, because he bore it realized in Himself, is that God reveals Himself to man in man, and that humanity enters into a divine fellowship with God. . . ." "The eternal principle that the divine shines through the human as its medium received then a new application, precise and fruitful; this application was the Christian religion and the cultus of Jesus, and it could not be anything else."

It is difficult to believe that the writer is here conscious of the full bearing of his words. He speaks from one philosophical standpoint when he criticizes Harnack; he shifts to another, which is diametrically opposed to it, when he becomes conscious of the criticism with which Harnack might retort upon him. Christianity is historical,

nothing but historical, and therefore to seek absolute religion at any given point in its history is vain—this is his attitude as against Harnack; Christianity rests upon an eternal principle—a principle, as he puts it, which man had always believed, though he had only vaguely understood it—a principle entering into the very constitution of his nature and making him what he is—the familiar Hegelian principle that God is the truth of man and that man is the reality of God—this is his attitude when amid the ceaseless flux of the historical, where everything is at the same time legitimate and illegitimate, he is compelled to find a rule for judging and a standard of appreciation. But can it be said that it is a Christian rule or standard? Does it do justice to Christianity as a historical phenomenon? Does it do justice to the relation which Christ assumed both to God and to man if we express His significance thus: “He was the first to manifest in a clear and intelligible way the eternal principle in virtue of which man is what he is”? One may doubt it, and in any case it is not easy to see how the criterion of Christianity as a historical religion is to be found outside of both Christianity and history. Of course it must be admitted that Christianity is essentially related to the constitution of human nature; if it were not so, it would be unintelligible and useless to men. We are created in order to be Christian: it is as true that we are made for Christ as that Christ is given to us. But it is not in the primitive revelation implicit in our nature that we can read the essential truth of the gospel; it is not in ourselves that we find the criterion and measure of Christianity; and if there are philosophical difficulties in Harnack’s way when he tries to fix a moment in history which has a unique eternal worth, they are not transcended by Loisy when in dealing with an essentially historical question he takes flight from history to metaphysics. It hardly repays the reader to follow him here. Most people

will think that Harnack has a good case when he argues that the essential elements in the gospel are "timeless"; that though the gospel in the Evangelists is bound up with a conception of nature and history which we have outlived, it is not inseparably bound up with it, and that man, to whom the gospel is addressed, in spite of all advances in science and civilization, remains in his inner nature and in his fundamental relations to the external world for ever the same. Instead, however, of pursuing these abstract considerations it will enable us better to appreciate the way in which Harnack and Loisy respectively conceive the essence of Christianity if we compare their discussions of characteristic Christian ideas. Of these, two may be taken as typical—the Kingdom of God and the Son of God.

With regard to the Kingdom, Harnack's view can be given in a sentence. He finds in the gospels, which here represent truly the teaching of Jesus, expressions of the most various kinds. They range from the prophetic announcement of the judgment day, and of the future visible coming of the divine sovereignty, all painted in the colours of Old Testament prophecy, to the thought of an inward coming of the Kingdom which is already beginning, and which takes its start with the message of Jesus. Harnack admits that between these two poles—the day of judgment and the inward coming—there is a vast interval, and that it is very difficult for us to combine them as they were combined in the life of Jesus. But he does not feel at liberty, for that reason, to sacrifice either the one side or the other, or to say that Jesus could not have combined them in His life at all. In particular, he does not feel at liberty to sacrifice what for brevity's sake may be called the spiritual to the eschatological view. On the ground of passages like Matthew xii. 28, Luke xvii. 21, Matthew xi. 2 ff., Luke xix. 10, not to mention the parables, he holds firmly to the idea that the Kingdom of God was in some sense and to some intent

present. He is conscious of the risk we run in depreciating the spectacular and dramatic presentation of the Kingdom and its coming—the risk of losing the native pith and colour of religion, and of putting in the place of the vivid message of Jesus a washed out moral programme; but he is prepared to take the risk. The original element in the teaching of Jesus, he argues, and not the inherited one, is that in which its characteristic power and value lie; and the original element is the spiritual, not the eschatological. When it comes to the point, the eschatological element is simply dropped. “The Kingdom of God is God’s sovereignty, certainly, but it is the sovereignty of the Holy God in individual hearts, it is God Himself with His power. All that is dramatic in the external sense, the sense of universal history, has here disappeared, and the whole external hope of the future has sunk beneath the horizon with it. Take whatever parable you please, the sower, the priceless pearl, the treasure in the field—the word of God, God Himself, is the Kingdom; and it is not angels and devils, it is not thrones and principalities, with which we have to do, but God and the soul, the soul and its God.”

It can hardly be denied that there is a considerable degree of arbitrariness in this summary rejection of what the New Testament from beginning to end calls “hope,” and all the more that if there was one thing which more than another was characteristic of primitive Christianity it was precisely this hope. Harnack regards this as a kind of relapse from the standpoint of Jesus, yet the relapse was formal rather than real. The *kingdom* was spoken of by the Apostles as something merely future; the real blessings of the gospel in the present, which Jesus had included under the heading of the Kingdom, were not lost, but had other designations. On this whole subject Loisy seems at first to stand at the opposite pole from Harnack. He agrees with him only formally in saying that the gospel message is that of

the Kingdom of God and its coming ; as soon as the contents of the message have to be defined he parts from him completely. He holds with that recent school of New Testament scholarship which lays the whole stress in the gospels on the eschatological representation of the Kingdom. He rejects unceremoniously the idea that not what Jesus inherited is of value in Christianity, but only what is His own ; nothing was more truly His own, nothing had greater value to Him, than what He had inherited—the ancient revelation and the hopes it had inspired. He gets rid of the texts on which Harnack bases his spiritual conception of Christianity by methods which some will describe as exegetical and critical, others as the unscrupulous use of the rack and the knife. Perhaps it is enough to say that they are quite unconvincing. But what remains for him as the essential thing in the conception of the kingdom is precisely that which Harnack drops out of it, viz. the *Zukunftshoffnung*, the absolute hope. There is not, and never has been, nor can be in the world, such a thing as Christianity without an absolute hope. But historically this absolute hope has always been determined by circumstances, and the precise contents of it at any particular time or in any particular mind can never be made obligatory for all time or for all minds. Even the form which it had in the mind of Jesus was historically determined, and has no more authority for us than any other form which it has ever assumed. M. Loisy is perfectly frank about this. “ When Jesus said with solemnity : ‘ I tell you of a truth that among those who are here there are some who shall not taste death till they see the Son of man coming in His Kingdom,’ He uttered a dogmatic proposition much less absolute at bottom than in appearance ; He demanded faith in the nearness of the kingdom ; but the idea of the Kingdom and that of its proximity were two very simple symbols of things extremely complex, and even those who first

believed in this promise found it necessary to cling to the spirit rather than to the letter of it, if they were always to prove it true." M. Loisy scoffs somewhere at those who teach that we are saved by faith, independently of our beliefs; but in this passage he seems to come very close to this dubious position. It is the same elsewhere when he writes: "Jesus and the Church have their eyes raised in the same direction, towards the same symbol of hope; and the Church observes, with regard to the heavenly Kingdom, the same attitude as Jesus." To look in the same direction, though you see quite different things, does not seem a very important agreement; and in spite of the tenacity with which he vindicates for Jesus a purely eschatological conception of the Kingdom, and insists on the necessity of the Christian maintaining Jesus' attitude, it is clear that for himself eschatology is as unimportant—so far as its contents are concerned—as it is for Harnack. Its object is God and the providential destiny of the world. No doubt Harnack also believes in God and in a providential destiny of the world, though he would probably be slow to assert that this faith or hope yielded to him what early Christians found in the vivid eschatology of the gospels. But Loisy does more than attenuate the hope of the gospels to an attitude; there is a striking passage in which, speaking of that hope in connexion with 'Jesus Himself, he describes it in terms which seem to convey precisely Harnack's opinion. "The dream of Jesus," he says, "was His project itself, the realization of perfect blessedness in perfect righteousness, of immortality in holiness. And this realization was already wrought in Him by union to God, by trust in the heavenly Father, by the inward certainty of the eternal future guaranteed to humanity in His person and by Himself." What is this but Harnack's formula, God and the soul, the soul and its God—a relation of God and the soul realized here through the mediation of Jesus, and including everything in itself?

To pass to our second illustration. The Son of God is regarded, both by Harnack and Loisy, as standing in some relation to the kingdom of God, and they differ formally in defining the title just as they differ in defining the kingdom. According to Harnack, who rests His case on the well-known passage in Matthew xi. 27, in which the Son and the Father are spoken of absolutely, as having relations to each other which belong to them alone, the knowledge of God is the sphere of the Divine sonship. "Rightly understood, the knowledge of God is the whole content of the name Son." To say that Jesus is the Son is to say that He knows the Father; it means that, and it means no more. It is on the basis of this filial consciousness, which is the ultimate and immutable thing in Christianity, that the Messianic consciousness somehow or other arose—a consciousness naturally less intelligible to the non-Jewish world, and consequently destined to no permanent place there. To all this Loisy seems at first to be diametrically opposed. "The distinction that has been drawn between the filial consciousness and the Messianic consciousness is absolutely gratuitous. Primitive tradition never suspected it; and modern criticism, had there been no theological interest at stake, would perhaps not have suspected it either. The filial sentiment which inspires the inner life of Jesus is one thing, the reflective consciousness of His rôle in providence is another. It is not the filial sentiment referred to which makes Jesus Son of God in a sense belonging to Him alone. All men who say to God, Our Father, are sons of God on the same terms; and Jesus would only be one of them if there were nothing in question but knowledge of the divine goodness and trust in it. The critic may conjecture that the filial sentiment preceded and prepared for the Messianic consciousness, the soul of Jesus being raised by prayer, confidence and love to the highest degree of union with God, so that the idea of the Messianic vocation crowned,

so to speak, naturally this inward experience ; but so far as the title Son of God belongs exclusively to the Saviour, it is equivalent to that of Messiah ; it rests on His character as Messiah ; it belongs to Jesus, not in virtue of His inward sentiments and religious experiences, but in virtue of His providential function, and as the unique agent of the Kingdom of heaven." In spite of its clearness and emphasis, this is surely very open to criticism. For one thing, it is pervaded by a thoroughly false contrast. It is inconceivable that the filial sentiment which inspired the inner life of Jesus, and the reflective consciousness of His rôle in providence, should simply stand side by side. In some sense they must coalesce ; it must be because Jesus is what He is, in His inner relation to God, that He is called to discharge His particular rôle in providence. For another, it is not true to say that Jesus would only be one man among others if there were nothing in question but knowledge of the Divine goodness and trust in it. To maintain this position Loisy has to strike out of the gospel the passage in Matthew xi. 27 in which Jesus asserts precisely the contrary. For this act of violence there is no justification whatever. The attraction it has for Loisy is that it gives even to Jesus' consciousness of Himself as Son of God, in the unique sense which makes Him the object of Christian faith, a form—the Messianic form—which is unmistakably relative to a given historical situation ; a form therefore which it is obligatory on the Church, and accordingly legitimate for the Church, to recast as circumstances require. Even the Christology of Jesus has for M. Loisy no finality. You cannot go back to A.D. 29 or 30, and lift Christianity just as it was, and carry it across the centuries unchanged, and set it down in A.D. 1905 ; in A.D. 29 the mind of Christ about Himself and the Kingdom of God was a mind adapted to the time, and it has been in process of adaptation to succeeding times ever since. This is what legitimates, not



any given Christology for all time, but all Christologies each for its own time; not any doctrine of the Church or of the Christian hope as an eternal truth, but all doctrines of the Church and all eschatologies which have appeared in Christian history, each for the period whose faith has produced it.

Once more, however, we feel the necessity, and Loisy feels it too, of having something to fix the mind in this perpetual flux. Grant that a ceaseless adaptation of the mind of Christ, even about Himself and about the Kingdom of God, is wanted, if Christianity is to live in a constantly changing and growing world, and still there must be something abidingly true in it to adapt; how are we to get hold of this? This is the critical point, and it is not very clear how Loisy answers the question. It is something, surely, which has been present in the history of men, that we wish to grasp; yet he tells us that at no stage of its development is the object of faith—and it is the object of faith which undergoes all these modifications and adaptations—perceptible, for the historian, as a *réalité de fait*. It is not for the historian to decide, among other things, if the Messianic idea in its first form and in its successive transformations is a truth. He knows it only as an idea or a force. On the other hand, “he will recognize in the most authentic words of Jesus the substance of this faith, viz., the eternal and unique predestination of the Messiah, His unique rôle in the economy of salvation, and His unique relation to God, a relation not based on a simple knowledge of His goodness, but on a substantial communication of Divine spirit, that is, of God Himself, to the predestined Messiah.” We may not be sure that we see the point of every word in this, but one thing seems certain; notwithstanding what has just been said about the invisibility of the object of faith, and notwithstanding the reduction of Christianity, in a passage already quoted, to a metaphysical

relation of the human and the divine, quite independent of Christ and of history, Loisy acknowledges at this point that the essence of Christianity lies in something which is to be seen in Christ alone, and which even the historian can see. The substance of the Christian faith which has lived through all the Christian centuries and which, through perpetual self-adaptation, has dominated their ideas and their institutions, making them the vehicles of Christianity—the substance of this Christian faith is recognizable by the historian in the most authentic words of Jesus. We do get the eternal truth and standard of Christianity in Christ and in history after all.

It may be partly due to mental slowness in the reader, partly to inconsistency in the writer, but much of Loisy leaves upon the mind a disagreeable impression of juggling with the ideas of faith and history. It is quite true that a distinction can be drawn; but when the distinction is pressed as though faith were independent of history, or as though the historian and the Christian could never be one man, who was bound to bring his spiritual life to unity and consistency with itself, a simple reader is apt to feel that he is being mocked. It is as though M. Loisy wished to argue him into the belief that faith is sufficient for itself; the spirit of Christ, or the Christian idea living in history, through Christian institutions, produces all the truths and hopes and motives—yes, and all the history—that it needs. The common mind of man is too honest ever to take up with any such conception. The only Christian faith it is or can be interested in is that which rests on historical fact, not that which rests on itself and produces facts. The common sense of mankind agrees with what is said of the Spirit in the Fourth Gospel; He shall not speak of Himself; He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you. If we have no unassailable facts to go upon, which are antecedent to faith—no facts which have it in

them to produce faith—then the Christian religion must cease to be. There may be a higher life of humanity in a general sense, a life which is independent of anything in the New Testament records; but if we cannot preach Christ to men who do not believe, with a view to evoking faith—that is, if there are not facts about Christ and facts embodied in Christ to which we can bear a testimony that is indistinguishably historical and Christian—then we can never propagate anything which is entitled to the name of Christianity.

To ask what these essential facts are is to ask a question too large to be answered here. But two, at least, are conspicuous. In the first place, we must know historically how Christ conceived of Himself. This is not to be discovered only in express assertions of which He is the subject; it may be revealed in an infinite variety of ways. But it must be discoverable as historical fact, if anything is to survive in the world which can have such a continuity with the religion of the New Testament as to entitle it to the Christian name. When a writer like Weinel raises the question whether Jesus regarded Himself as more than a man, and notwithstanding an eager profession of loyalty to Jesus tells us that it is his scientific duty to confess that the question can no longer be answered with certainty, one can only be glad that a Christian education is so tenacious, and that the human mind is so capable of inconsistency. If Jesus was not in His own consciousness, and in historical fact, quite independent of how men took it, more than another unit in the census lists of the Roman empire, and if we cannot be historically sure of this, then Christianity has no foundation. The other essential fact is the exaltation of Jesus. Both Harnack and Loisy deal with this on lines which to most Christians will seem quite inadequate. We need hardly recall Harnack's distinction between the Easter faith and the Easter message. Evidently he regards

them as entirely separable things : the faith is self-attesting, and may be accepted, though we reject the message. Loisy's criticism of this does not touch the point. The distinction, he says, is not historical ; it may have a basis in reason, but it has none in the gospel ; in point of fact, the faith historically lived in the message and had no life apart from it. But what Loisy means by this is that out of the Christian life in the hearts of Jesus' friends the message and the faith were born together ; they have the same kind of internal historicity, and in conjunction they were potent enough to generate the most wonderful experiences. But this is not in the least the point of view of any of the primitive witnesses, nor does it provide the basis for any Christianity of the fibre which we find in the New Testament. According to the Evangelists, it is not faith which produces the message ; neither are the message and faith the common birth of one mysterious but purely spiritual experience ; it is the message which produces faith. Jesus was not exalted merely in the faith and love of His disciples, as though He had said to them, Because *you* live I shall live also ; He was exalted *simpliciter*, exalted for unbelief as truly, though not to the same intent, as for faith ; or else we have no *Christian* religion to preach.

The essence of Christianity must lie both in what Christ was and in what He is, and both what He was and what He is must have reality in every sense of the word. Harnack's tendency is to emphasize the *was* at the expense of the *is*, and then to beat himself into a moral passion in the contemplation of the past. Loisy's is to emphasize the *is* at the expense of the *was*, and to reconcile himself by ingenious sophistries to all that is least Christian in the Church of Rome, because all of it is connected somehow with the movement initiated by Jesus. But justice is only done when the *was* and the *is* are equally emphasized ; when the exaltation of Jesus is seen to make the past present,

and the historical eternal and divine. Christianity has to be naturalized in the world—Loisy is right in emphasizing this aspect of the truth; but it is a supernatural thing which has to be naturalized, and Harnack may seem to have the acuter sense of that. But neither can be said to do justice to what is as essential as the presence of a divine life in Jesus when He walked the earth nineteen hundred years ago: the perpetuation of that same life, not by the vivid exercise of the historical imagination, and still less by the mere inheritance of Christian tradition, but by the action of the spirit of Jesus, exalted to the right hand of God.

JAMES DENNEY.

*ISAAC, THE TYPE OF QUIETNESS.*

ISAAC is one of those men who have never received justice from the readers of Bible history, not because anything very serious can be said against them, but because very little can be said about them, either good or bad. His fate is not to be criticized, it is to be ignored; it is not that people have a grudge against him, it is that they have no opinion about him. If one were required to write a sketch of Isaac and to subtract from it all that belonged to Abraham and all that must be assigned to Rebecca, there would be a very scanty balance. He appeared in various striking scenes, but in each he was only a secondary figure—a mere accessory to the play. Once only did he take the initiative, and that was a blunder; Isaac never took a line of his own, except on that ill-starred occasion, and even that may be left out of account, for he was completely helpless in other people's hands. Sum up his record according to the book of Genesis and it comes to this: at twenty-five Abraham would have sacrificed him; at forty Abraham