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MAUDE PETRE ON LOISY'S RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE: SPIRITUALITY AND CRITICAL HISTORY

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Alfred Loisy's enduring significance, in Maude Petre's view, lay in his struggle to define the relationship between religious faith and facts accessible to historical critics. Arguing from both his understanding of religious faith and his commitment to historical scholarship, he opposed what Petre called the "theologico-scientific presentation of dogma" prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church of the early 20th century. Loisy thus sought to preserve the integrity of both critical scholarship and mystical faith.

JUST AS FRANCE WAS COLLAPSING in the face of German attacks in 1940, Alfred Firmin Loisy died. Though Loisy had been one of the most important and controversial figures in the Modernist Crisis within Roman Catholicism at the beginning of the 20th century, his death attracted little attention at the time. Writing in the *Hibbert Journal*, Loisy's old friend Maude Petre commented that "one cannot but grieve when the death of great men has to pass unnoticed because a more absorbing tragedy has overshadowed such events." "But," she continued, "thought lives on after wars are forgotten."[1] In her article in the *Hibbert Journal* and at greater length in a short book entitled *Alfred Loisy: His Religious Significance*, Petre did what she could to ensure that Loisy's thought did indeed live on.[2]

Petre's decision to write a book about Loisy seems, at first glance, strange. Herself a veteran of the Modernist Crisis that had led to Loisy's

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[1] M. D. Petre, "Alfred Loisy, 1857–1940," *Hibbert Journal* 39 (1940–1941) 5–14, at 5.
[2] M. D. Petre, *Alfred Loisy: His Religious Significance* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1944).

excommunication more than three decades earlier, she had already published one of the first histories of the period, *Modernism, Its Failures and Its Fruits*. Since that time, she had published other articles and books about Modernism and its principal figures, including Loisy. What more could she say either about Loisy or about the lessons to be learned from the controversial events of the Modernist Crisis?

Judging from the number of citations to Petre's book, scholars seem to have concluded that the answer to this question is, not much. Despite this neglect, however, Petre's book repays careful analysis by anyone interested in Loisy. After all, Petre had known him for several decades by the time she wrote her book. They exchanged numerous letters (some included in the appendix to her book) in which they discussed common acquaintances, ideas, and their published works. In these letters, Loisy significantly endorsed her interpretations of his work and his life, including specifically an article of hers on his three-volume autobiography.[3] Loisy could not comment on her book about his religious significance, of course, but it is her fullest statement about Loisy and the final published word on Modernism by a Modernist who had been actively involved in the pivotal events of the first decade of the 20th century. Indeed Petre, in her mid-70s when she began work on the book, died before it appeared, making it her final published word of any sort on Loisy's religious significance.

Petre's book on Loisy also reveals a great deal about her. She wrote the book self-consciously as "a Catholic, a member of the Church from which Alfred Loisy was excluded."[4] She thus introduced the volume by contrasting Loisy's religious position with her own. She identified herself in the same way in her 1937 autobiography, *My Way of Faith*, though without reference to Loisy: unlike many of her friends with Modernist inclinations, she said there, she had remained Catholic. After noting that converts quite naturally told the story of their conversion, she described her own story as "one not of change but of adherence; not of conversion, but of stability."[5] She was Catholic, and she remained Catholic. Despite this emphasis on her

[3] M. D. Petre, "M. Loisy's Autobiography," *Hibbert Journal* 29 (1930–1931) 655–66; Loisy to Petre, August 12, 1931, in *Alfred Loisy* 124–25. See also his comments on her autobiography, *My Way of Faith* (ibid. 127–28).

[4] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 1.

[5] M. D. Petre, *My Way of Faith* (London: J. M. Dent, 1937) xi. On this work, see Ellen Leonard, "Telling the Story: Maude Petre as Autobiographer," in *Personal Faith and Institutional Commitments: Roman Catholic Modernist and Anti-Modernist Autobiography,* ed. Lawrence Barmann and Harvey Hill (Scranton, Penn.: University of Scranton, 2002) 113–26; Clyde Crews, *English Catholic Modernism: Maude Petre's Way of Faith* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1984).

religious differences from Loisy, Petre also began her book on him by identifying him as her friend and insisting that "he had a message of religious significance . . . from which Christianity, and even Catholicism, can draw profit."[6] How, the reader might well ask, could a Catholic find value in the religious philosophy of a man excommunicated from the Church and declared *vitandus*? Insofar as her book on Loisy helps to answer this question, it continues the apologia of *My Way of Faith*, explaining again how Petre could remain Catholic without repudiating her Modernist convictions.

What, then, according to Petre, was Loisy's ongoing religious significance? What was central to his work, and what lessons did it have for the Catholic Church? Petre insisted that Loisy's "figure in future Church history is of the greatest importance, as no one more clearly than he has presented the problem of a spiritual body with an historic foundation."[7] In his life and work, she observed, Loisy struggled with the relationship between the historical facts accessible to scholars—the historical foundation of the Church—and the religious meaning that believers found in the facts, the spiritual character of the Church. If Loisy did not himself resolve this problem satisfactorily, he at least made these tensions explicit without ever reducing spirituality to mere factuality or denying facts that appeared inconsistent with his religious convictions. As Petre told Loisy's story and then analyzed his publications, she highlighted this tension between historical facts and spiritual value by always emphasizing both his critical integrity as a scholar and his appreciation for the life of the spirit. This dual emphasis on his critical scholarship and his spirituality distinguished Petre's picture of Loisy from that of the other biographers personally acquainted with him.

THE "PROBLEM" OF ALFRED LOISY

Before discussing what Petre's book is, I should note what it is not. First, as Petre insisted, it is not a biography of Loisy.[8] Those interested in a full account of his story she referred to his autobiography, which was "ample in facts and matter." Her book, by contrast, would "present the leading char-

[6] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 1. [7] Ibid. 2–3.

[8] This authorial strategy was typical of Petre. She approached her own life in the same way in *My Way of Faith*; she denied it was an autobiography and described it as "discursive and without chronological consistency" (ix). It, too, told the story—in this case her own story—as a way of presenting religious ideas. She began her book on Modernism with the similar claim that it "is not a history, but a study of modernism" (M. D. Petre, *Modernism: Its Failure and Its Fruits* [London: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1918] 4).

acteristics of his work and teaching from the religious point of view."[9] The first half of the book does tell Loisy's story chronologically, through his excommunication in 1908, but it does so in order to highlight the religious issues Petre considered most important. So, for example, she titled the first chapter on Loisy's early religious education "Faith and Orthodoxy" and dedicated the narrative to Loisy's reaction against the orthodoxy he met in school. She thus raised the basic problem of the book: how to relate authentic religious faith to the Church's dogmatic teaching? This relationship, Petre argued, was considerably more complex than some Catholic readers might have assumed.

Petre was similarly selective in her chapter on "The Modernist Movement." She described the judgment against Loisy's books in the first years of the 20th century and some of the resulting negotiations between him and representatives of the Catholic hierarchy without ever mentioning his final, unconditional submission to the judgment against him.[10] Presumably Loisy's act of submission did not clarify his religious significance. Omitting Loisy's submission was noteworthy because it contrasted sharply with how others told Loisy's story. Loisy himself said that his "little letter [of submission] was a monument of ineptitude, which attested to the extreme fatigue of my mind during those days. . . . Never have I pardoned myself for this absurd and apparently suspect declaration." These lines appeared in the middle of several pages of commentary in which Loisy insisted that, questionable though his submission was, it deceived no one.[11] Some of Loisy's biographers emphasized his submission just as strongly, if with a different interpretation. Albert Houtin, for example, in his hostile biography of Loisy titled one of his longest chapters "The Submission" and presented the act as evidence of Loisy' basic dishonesty.[12]

[9] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 3. By referring her readers to Loisy's autobiographies rather than to competing accounts of his role in the Modernist Crisis, Petre explicitly privileged his interpretation of those controversial events. Similarly, she ended virtually every chapter with more or less lengthy quotations from Loisy, literally giving him the last word on every issue she treated. She did not, however, simply accept all his judgments at face value. For example, she insisted that he was not fair to many of his friends (see, e.g., 22). She had made the same point in her review of his *Mémoires* and repeated it here despite Loisy's protest. See Petre, "Loisy's Autobiography" 664, and Loisy to Petre, August 12, 1931, quoted in Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 124–25.

[10] Ibid. 49–51.

[11] Alfred Loisy, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire religieuse de notre temps*, 3 vols., (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1930–1931) 2:367–77, esp. 368–69.

[12] Albert Houtin, *La vie d'Alfred Loisy*, in *Alfred Loisy: Sa vie—son oeuvre*, ed. Émile Poulat (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1960) 118–27. On Houtin's biography, see Harvey Hill, "Houtin's Loisy: The Construction of a Modernist," in Hill, Louis-Pierre Sardella, and C. J. T. Talar, *By Those Who Knew Them: Modernists Left, Right, and Center* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2008).

Second, Petre's book was not a defense of Loisy's character. Beginning with *Pascendi dominici gregis*, the 1907 encyclical condemning Modernism, many Catholics accused the leading Modernists of acting in bad faith, of misrepresenting themselves as Catholics when in fact they rejected church teaching. Such Catholic criticisms received support from an unlikely source when the rationalist Albert Houtin portrayed Loisy and other Modernists as pious frauds.[13] Loisy defended himself in voluminous autobiographical writings, as did his friends Henri Bremond and, much later, Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne.[14] Scholars have since explored "the enigma of Alfred Loisy" in an effort to determine whether or not he had been a faithless priest.[15] Petre offers a valuable perspective on the question of Loisy's character.[16] But unlike Loisy's other friends who devoted books to

[13] The full extent of Houtin's criticism of Loisy emerged slowly: first in his *History of Modernism* of 1913, then in his autobiography, and finally in a posthumously published biography of Loisy.

[14] See Loisy, *Mémoires* and *Choses passées* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1913); Henri Bremond, "Un clerc qui n'a pas trahi," in *Une oeuvre clandestine d'Henri Bremond*, ed. Émile Poulat (Roma: Storia e Letteratura, 1972) 111–68; Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, *Alfred Loisy: Entre la foi et l'incroyance* (Paris: Centurion, 1968). For an analysis of Loisy's autobiographies, see also Harvey Hill, "More Than a Biblical Critic: Loisy's Reform Agenda in Light of His Autobiographies," in *Personal Faith and Institutional Commitments* 14–37. For an analysis of Bremond's portrayal of Loisy, see Harvey Hill, "In Defense of Loisy's Mysticism: Bremond's Modernist Confession," in *By Those Who Knew Them*.

[15] See Alec R. Vidler, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1970); Émile Poulat, *Critique et mystique: Autour de Loisy ou la conscience catholique et l'esprit moderne* (Paris: Centurion, 1984); Ronald Burke, "Loisy's Faith: Landshift in Catholic Thought," *Journal of Religion* 60 (1980) 138–64.

[16] Strangely, however, Petre's book has not received significant attention by the scholars who have published on this question. In his generally helpful survey of opinions about Loisy, Burke lists Petre's writings about Loisy in a note on "defenses of Loisy . . . not treated here" ("Loisy's Faith" 146 n. 24). Vidler cites Petre's book a few times in the two chapters of his *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* devoted to "The Enigma of Alfred Loisy," and he lists her along with Archbishop Eudoxe-Irénée-Edouard Mignot and Bremond as better judges of Loisy's character than Houtin. But Vidler does not analyze her contribution at any length (*Variety* 55). In a bibliographic note, de Boyer (*Alfred Loisy* 230) endorses Petre's books, particularly *My Way of Faith*, in Loisy's name. Since Petre's *Alfred Loisy* appeared after Loisy's death, this endorsement could not include it, and de Boyer makes no other reference to it. Poulat, *Critique et mystique* 96–99, comments on Petre's book. The oddest example of neglect, however, comes from a book on Petre herself: Clyde Crews, *English Catholic Modernism: Maude Petre's Way of Faith* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1984). In a chapter on Petre's insights into Modernist leaders from the 1920s and 1930s, Crews (ibid. 92) cites the criticisms of Baron Friedrich von Hügel in Petre's *Alfred Loisy*. Then for his discussion of Petre's mature opinion about Loisy Crews relies entirely on an article Petre wrote

his life and thought, she did not treat his character as the enigma to be explained or the problem to be solved.

Although Petre described her book as "a work of friendship,"[17] she did not defend Loisy's integrity so much as presume it. For example, she stated without elaboration that Loisy lived "a life of utter purity and integrity." He was, she insisted, "unworldly, unambitious; direct and truthful."[18] She used even stronger language in her article on Loisy's autobiography: "No one would be so unperceptive as to suggest that episcopal honours would have kept him in the Church from motives of vulgar ambition or vanity."[19] This was, in fact, precisely Houtin's claim in another one of the longest chapters of his biography of Loisy,[20] but nothing in Petre's work indicates that she knew about Houtin's allegations. In different ways, Loisy himself as well as his defenders Bremond and de Boyer took as their thesis what Petre simply asserted: Loisy acted with integrity. She did not defend the point because, for her, the problem of Alfred Loisy lay elsewhere.

As stated above, Petre understood the problem presented by Alfred Loisy not as one particular to him; in her view, he thought about, and lived within, the tense and complex intersection of Christian spirituality and historical factuality. Some, she said, considered religious faith negligible and therefore concentrated on history without attending to questions of religious faith. Others tried to suppress history in the name of religious faith.[21] As a Catholic, Loisy refused to adopt either of these strategies and was thus a living example of this tension. Moreover, even after his excommunication, Petre argued, Loisy continued to wrestle with this relationship of faith and factuality. This, then, was Loisy's problem: the contested relationship of history and spirituality, of factuality and faith.[22] In her book

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in 1918, omitting altogether her final book on Loisy's religious significance. As a consequence, he emphasizes her criticisms of Loisy's humanism, when in fact she concluded her most mature assessment of Loisy's religious significance by praising his commitment to the spiritual character of the universe.

[17] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 1. [18] Ibid. 110.

[19] See also Petre, "Loisy's Autobiography" 660; Petre, *Modernism* 158. Petre did acknowledge that Loisy practiced "a certain reticence" in presenting some of his opinions. She explained this reticence as stemming from the fact that Loisy "was working for the future even more than for the present; he knew that those to whom he had to address himself had no understanding of the problem" (Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 50). Elsewhere she acknowledged that "many of us knew the problem was graver than we dared to admit," but practiced a strategic reserve because, after all, "orthodoxy had its rights" (*My Way of Faith* 210).

[20] Houtin, *Loisy* 102–12.

[21] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 3. She made the same claim in *My Way of Faith* 235.

[22] Petre accepted Pius's accusation that Modernism was the synthesis of all heresies "because it was and remains the only definite presentment—*on the part of Christian believers*—of that soul-wracking question: What are we to do with the

on Loisy, Petre used him as a vehicle for addressing this problem; every chapter took it up in one way or another.

LOISY'S MODERNIST PROJECT

During his Catholic career, Loisy's ecclesiastical context complicated his efforts to untangle spirituality and critical scholarship by introducing a third variable: a highly intellectual, even rationalistic, presentation of Catholic doctrine backed by the authority of the Church.[23] From the very beginning of his intellectual and spiritual formation, Petre observed, Loisy experienced a tension between spirituality and this rationalistic orthodoxy. In his first year at the seminary of Châlons-sur-Marne, at age 17, Loisy already perceived that "the demands of orthodoxy were not always consistent with the demands of truth. . . . It was dogmatism, as enshrined in orthodoxy, that came athwart his early and enthusiastic faith."[24] This was not initially an intellectual conflict, Petre noted. Loisy did not yet oppose critical scholarship to Catholic doctrine. The opposition he identified was rather between "the orthodox and strictly dogmatic expression of religious truth" and "its mystical and spiritual meaning." Only later did he perceive an analogous opposition between orthodoxy and "the liberty of scientific thought."[25] Petre repeatedly returned to "the chilling effects of rigid dogma on spiritual experience" as well as to "the disturbing character of the conflict between orthodoxy and truth." Loisy's "soul," she insisted, "craved for a more spiritual apprehension of truth," just as "his mind demanded a more scientific one."[26] To him, orthodoxy seemed antithetical to genuine spirituality as well as to genuine scholarship.

As Loisy matured, the demand of his mind for a more scientific treatment of church history increasingly overshadowed his craving for a more spiritual apprehension of truth. Critical scholarship both reinforced his discomfort with the presentation of orthodoxy that he had learned in the seminary and helped him to articulate his objections to it. But Loisy did not, at first, publicly express his growing doubts. He self-consciously addressed his early publications to the specialized audience capable of understanding critical scholarship. Petre did not dwell on the details of this

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articles of our religious Catechism when the articles of our scientific and historical catechism come into direct conflict with them?" (*My Way of Faith* 208–9, emphasis original; see also 229). She took up precisely the same question in *Alfred Loisy*.

[23] Petre described the presentation of Catholic doctrine in her day thus: the Church "asserted the strict scientific and intellectual character of dogma, and allowed of no relative, or moral, or spiritual, or symbolic conception of its value" (*Modernism* 119).

[24] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 7.

[25] Ibid. 10.

[26] Ibid. 13.

critical work, but she quoted at some length his summary of his "programme of very simple, but vast and logical teaching, which would have filled my life had I been left free to fulfill it."[27] For her purposes, what mattered more than the technical details was the implication of this work for church teaching. "Orthodoxy, for him, signified the intransigent defence of religious dogma, not in a purely spiritual, but in a quasi-scientific sense; for it seemed to him that theologians claimed for theology a double quality of certainty, the quality of faith and the quality of assured scientific truth. . . . It was the validity of the latter point that he denied."[28] Like his appreciation for the "mystical and spiritual meaning" of doctrines, she noted, Loisy's critical scholarship challenged the scientific pretensions of church teaching at that time even when he did not make this challenge explicit.

Loisy's problem, particularly during his Catholic period, was therefore not simply the relationship of spirituality and historical fact, though that was complicated enough. His problem was the relationship of church teaching to spirituality, on the one hand, and to historical fact on the other. Efforts by orthodox theologians to define religious faith in rational and/or historical terms distorted both faith and science. Petre's Loisy sought to defend the integrity of religious faith over against these alleged, quasi-scientific distortions, and he did so in part by attacking the distortions of history that underlay them.

Which was more important to Loisy himself, spirituality or critical history? Petre was not fully consistent in her answer. At times, she emphasized Loisy's intellectual doubts more than his spiritual objections to church teaching. For example, she claimed in her chapter on "Faith and Orthodoxy" that his intellectual work was what "finally separated him from that Church to which he had so ardently desired to adhere."[29] She repeated the point in her chapter on "The Modernist Movement" itself: "Loisy's aim was to open the eyes of theologians to the existence of the historic problem. . . . He wanted freedom in his historical and critical studies. . . . His main object was not apologetic, but he was drawn to an apologetic attempt by the impact of history on Scriptural science and belief."[30] More generally, "Modernism is the story of the impact of science on faith,

[27] See also Petre, "Loisy's Autobiography" 658–59.
[28] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 15–16. [29] Ibid. 16–17.
[30] Ibid. 41, 46. She said the same in her earlier book *Modernism*: "he was first a *savant*, though, at the same time, a devout Catholic priest; and it was when he found that his convictions as a savant raised difficulties against his faith as a Catholic that he sought some way to reconcile the exigencies of both positions" (46–47). After his excommunication Petre confidently predicted that Loisy would "dedicate the rest of his life to purely scientific labours" (ibid. 123). In fact, he surprised her on this point.

and the resistance of faith to science. . . . This was a war; a war between the custodians of faith and the pioneers or custodians of science."[31] Petre opened the second part of her book with the assertion that "the critical studies of his early days, and Scripture exegesis, continued to be Loisy's main occupations to the end of his life," a point she repeated at the beginning of the penultimate chapter, as well as in her final chapter on "The Significance of Loisy."[32] Petre never claimed the capacity to assess Loisy's critical work, and she explicitly set it aside when discussing his religious philosophy, because her own interests lay elsewhere.[33] But she always stressed Loisy's critical work and its role in his separation from the Church. In so doing, she highlighted the intellectual issues at stake in the Modernist Crisis.

On the other hand, Petre also suggested that Loisy's critical work was less important to him in his conflict with the Catholic hierarchy than his spiritual or mystical longings. For example, she began her book with the claim that "the main interest of his life was a religious one."[34] She noted that Loisy felt the tension between Catholic dogma and mystical faith before he ever became aware of possible intellectual problems.[35] The "freedom of historic truth" mattered to Loisy, but "what mattered more" was the inconsistency of orthodoxy "with the strictly spiritual character of Christianity."[36] Despite his ongoing critical work,"the religious interest remained paramount, and not only did religious documents remain the one object of his scientific labour, but religion itself became, almost increasingly, his chief mental preoccupation."[37] With such claims Petre portrayed Modernism more as a religious movement than an academic one.

For the purposes of this article, deciding whether Loisy's critical work mattered more to him than his mystical religion is less important than Petre's point that *both* issues led him to question "the presentation of Catholic belief as set forth in the dogmatic and moral theology of the Church."[38] Loisy objected to any "presentation of belief" that was "not in a purely spiritual, but in a quasi-scientific sense."[39] "The theologico-scientific presentation of dogma," she repeated, "seemed to him an impoverishment of spiritual truth, a contradiction of historical truth."[40]

Petre's emphasis on both Loisy's critical scholarship and his mystical faith distinguishes her interpretation from that of her contemporaries, including Loisy himself. In his autobiographies Loisy typically emphasized

[31] Ibid. 51.
[32] Ibid. 62, 102, 109.
[33] Ibid. 102, 109.
[34] Ibid. 4.
[35] Ibid. 10, 14.
[36] Ibid. 20.
[37] Ibid. 76.
[38] Ibid. 11.
[39] Ibid. 16–17.
[40] Ibid. 21.

his critical objections to Catholic doctrine as a way of defending his intellectual integrity. Albert Houtin, in his emphasis on Loisy's critical objections to Catholic doctrine, flatly denied that Loisy had any authentic religious faith. By contrast, two of Loisy's friends and defenders, Henri Bremond and Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, emphasized his mystical spirituality more than his critical work as a way of defending his religious integrity. More clearly than any of them, Petre acknowledged the links between Loisy's religious and intellectual objections to church teaching, thus integrating these two sides of his work. Like Bremond and de Boyer, she herself cared more about Loisy's mystical religion and the philosophical works in which he analyzed religious faith than she did about his technical exegesis. Nonetheless she described Loisy's characteristic concerns in a more comprehensive way than did his defenders.

Petre could acknowledge the importance of both Loisy's religious and critical interests because she interpreted his thought in terms of the problem of "a spiritual Church with an historical foundation."[41] Loisy's own religious sensibilities and his writings about mystical faith related to the spiritual Church while his critical work related to the Church's historical foundation. He interested Petre, and had enduring religious significance, because these two sides of his work belonged together in their common opposition to the "quasi-scientific" form of church teaching in his day. Both undermined the literal and strictly rational character of church dogma, one by emphasizing the spiritual significance of religious teaching, the other by attacking the historical claims on which it was sometimes based.

After tracing Loisy's spiritual and intellectual formation in terms of the problem of a spiritual church with a historical foundation, Petre described his efforts to resolve the problem in her chapter on "The Modernist Movement." She called these efforts "hopeful" and insisted that hope was "the real bond of union" between those who could be called "Modernists." This hope took several forms: "hope that the Church would not repudiate the truths of science and history; . . . hope, more than hope, that the spiritual essence of dogma would survive all assaults of unbelieving criticism; hope in the indestructibility of faith and its capacity for the absorption of all human truth and knowledge."[42] Each of these forms of hope revolved around Loisy's central problem as Petre presented it: the relationship between the spiritual church and its historic foundation. Modernists hoped that the Church would not effectively deny its historical foundation by denying historical truth. Modernists also hoped that new historical knowledge would not compromise the spiritual value of church teaching. Most important of all, Modernists hoped that religious faith could integrate and profit from the new knowledge.

[41] Ibid. 18.

[42] Ibid. 40.

Inspired by this hope, Loisy tried to integrate religious faith and critical scholarship in his Modernist writings, especially in a large, unpublished work that he summarized and quoted at length in his *Mémoires*. Petre relied on this account for her discussion of this "*Livre inédit*," which she called "his greatest Modernist effort" and the best source for understanding "the Modernist programme of Loisy."[43] In fact, however, Petre said relatively little about the substance of Loisy's unpublished book. After a summary of its introductory chapters, she concluded that his unpublished book was "the work of a soul even more than a mind; . . . it was an endeavor to use his knowledge, his judgment, his intellect for the enlightenment of his own religious body."[44] This was what mattered to her: the religious inspiration of the book and the use in it of critical scholarship for the benefit of the Church. Drawn from the *Livre inédit*, Loisy's most important Modernist publication, *L'Évangile et l'Église*, did the same, Petre added.[45] It was "a statement of the impregnability of Catholic doctrine in its spiritual significance, along with a fearless recognition of historical facts."[46]

Events ultimately dashed Loisy's hopes for the kind of integration of spirituality and critical scholarship within the Church that he sought in his Modernist works, and they therefore drove him from the Church. He came to see "an ineluctable opposition between the theological and the historical points of view. Ironically, Loisy reached this position only after accepting one of the fundamental tenets of his harshest opponents—"identifying the Church with her official and orthodox rulers." If the hierarchy rejected his proposed synthesis, he came to believe, the Church itself rejected it and, by extension, rejected any future development in the direction of his Modernist hopes. In the terms that Petre introduced at the beginning of her book, Loisy came to believe that the Church denied the facts of its historical foundation and, simultaneously, its character as a spiritual body in the name of its "theologico-scientific presentation of dogma."[47]

Despite her personal sympathy for Loisy, Petre departed from him at this point and, even three decades after the condemnation of Modernism, retained the essential Modernist hope. So, for example, she noted that the ineluctable opposition that Loisy saw between the theological and historical points of view was "only true of theology in its static, not its dynamic, form; and it is not true of faith; not true of the Church past as well as

[43] Ibid. 42–43.

[44] Ibid. 45.

[45] Although *L'Évangile et l'Église* (Paris: A. Picard, 1902) is normally considered Loisy's most important Modernist publication, Petre herself considered his *Autour d'un petit livre* (Paris: A. Picard, 1903) more important; see Petre, *Modernism* 42.

[46] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 48–49.

[47] Ibid. 21, 44, 52, 59.

present, in her whole development and history."[48] Dynamic theology, religious faith, and the Church itself were better than the orthodoxy defended by a conservative hierarchy. Indeed a study of church history itself showed "that the resistance [of the Church to intellectual currents] always does come to an end, not by surrender to an outside force, but by the incorporation of that force into her own life."[49] The fact that Petre still retained this Modernist hope enabled her to remain Catholic long after Pius had condemned Modernism.

Because she linked Modernism and the profession of Catholicism in this way, Petre reversed the conventional understanding of orthodoxy and heresy. Orthodoxy as articulated in her day was, she implied, neither necessarily good nor necessarily expressed as loyalty to the Church. In her discussion of Loisy's intellectual and spiritual formation, she had already acknowledged the tension between orthodoxy on one hand and both spiritual value and historical truth on the other. Further, she attributed Loisy's departure from the Church at least partly to his acceptance of the orthodox position that the hierarchy defined the Church. Indeed, she added wryly, many Catholics in good standing were not as orthodox as Loisy at the time of his excommunication. Some of these Catholics were more heretical than he in that "they never think any doctrine, religious or even scientific, [is] . . . so unimpeachably true as to exclude all questioning and doubt."[50] By this measure, "those Modernists who remained in the Church" (and she surely meant herself here) were "more *heretical* than those who, like Loisy" left quietly.[51] Such Modernists could still look to the future in hope and faith that the Church would surrender its "resistance to the movement of . . . life" and incorporate the force currently outside of it "into her own life."[52] Ironically, then, Petre identified Modernism as a "heresy" that enabled Modernists to remain faithful Catholics! And Loisy, the so-called "Father of Catholic Modernism," was not Modernist enough. He was simply too "orthodox" to stay in the Church.

LOISY'S ENDURING SIGNIFICANCE

After his excommunication, Loisy was neither Modernist nor Catholic. No longer would he try to integrate historical scholarship and religious

[48] Ibid. 52.
[49] Ibid. 53; see also Petre, "Loisy's Autobiography" 665–66.
[50] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 58.
[51] Ibid. 59, emphasis original. By this standard Petre identified herself as a heretic, though without using the word. See *My Way of Faith* xxiii–xxiv; see also her *Modernism* 201–7 for a statement about her ongoing Modernist hope and her affirmation of the mystery that transcends every doctrinal claim.
[52] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 53.

faith within the context of Roman Catholicism. And yet, Petre insisted, he still had a religious significance for those like herself who continued to work for precisely this integration. Indeed, she devoted half of her book to an analysis of Loisy's postexcommunication writings—more than she devoted to the writings of his Catholic and Modernist period. What gave his later work this significance?

Loisy remained important specifically for Catholics because he continued to reflect on the central issue of the Modernist Crisis: the relationship of critical scholarship and religious faith. "Had Loisy, in abandoning his ecclesiastical career, abandoned all interest in religion, and devoted himself exclusively to scientific and historical work, there would have been no purpose in the present study," she conceded. In fact, however, "the religious interest remained paramount" in his life.[53] Loisy "was religious as a Catholic, and he never ceased to be religious."[54] During his post-Christian years he wrote "no fewer than nine or ten small volumes . . . consecrated to purely religious and moral considerations." "It is with the message of those later works that this second part of my study will deal," Petre explained, "and it is, indeed, largely the sense of their importance that inspires the whole of this attempt."[55] Just as he had done before his excommunication, so afterwards Loisy reflected deeply on the intersection of critical scholarship on Christian origins and issues of religious meaning. That he no longer did so within the context of Roman Catholicism did not undermine the value of his reflections, even for Catholics.

But Petre went beyond claiming merely that Loisy remained important after his excommunication. She acknowledged that her sense of the importance of his later works largely inspired her to write her book. Loisy's postexcommunication publications were, apparently, of *greater* importance to her than his Modernist writings. She did not explain why his later works might be more important, but she offered several clues. While a Catholic, Loisy's effort to wrestle with the difficult issue of spirituality and historical factuality inevitably took into consideration the form of current church teaching. As one of the "heretics" who remained in the Church, hoping it would come to accept some of the ideas it had rejected in its indiscriminate condemnation of Modernism, Petre surely shared Loisy's objections to the "quasi-scientific" presentation of Christian truth. All the same, she appears to have been less interested than he to oppose the orthodoxy of her day directly, preferring instead to seek spiritual truth where she could find it.[56] After Loisy's excommunication, he reflected on the relationship of spirituality and historical factuality without reference to the distortions so

[53] Ibid. 76.
[54] Ibid. 61.
[55] Ibid. 62.
[56] Petre said as much in *My Way of Faith* xv–xxii.

prevalent in church teaching at that time. Perhaps Petre appreciated the freedom of Loisy's postexcommunication reflections, or at least their less polemical character, precisely because they were more independent of the "theologico-scientific presentation of dogma" in the Church at the time.

Petre began her discussion of the significance of Loisy's later work by reminding her readers once again about his work as a biblical critic. His critical opinions about the historical Jesus did not change significantly over the course of his career, she claimed, even if "in Loisy's later works, there was, at times, a hardness in his treatment of this doctrine, a predominance of the critical over the religious outlook."[57] And his critical opinions had apologetic potential, she added, which he had articulated explicitly in his Modernist writings if not in his later work. Indeed, she suggested, "his work might prove, in the far future, more valuable for the cause of faith than living Christian apologists now dare imagine."[58] The value of his work for the cause of faith took two forms. On the one hand, he "saved Christ from what I should term *manipulation* on the part of Christians . . . who have either endeavored to find in Him the protagonist of their own religious faith, or the precursor of their own political party." On the other hand, and "still more emphatically," Loisy defended "the historic reality of the person of Jesus Christ from its obliteration by those [unbelieving critics] who would have left Christianity standing without Christ."[59] As a historical critic, Loisy had too much integrity to allow Christians to make of Jesus something he was not or to allow non-Christians to deny that Jesus ever existed at all.

Petre's main interest, however, lay elsewhere than in the details of Loisy's critical work, which mattered primarily because it established one side of the relationship of "Theology and Science." Again drawing on writings that spanned his entire professional life, Petre claimed that Loisy always argued that theology and historical science were separate, without entirely divorcing the two. As a Catholic, Loisy opposed the tendency of theology to "come out from her own domain to invade the realm of science." In his later years, he saw that "science, in her turn, was only too readily disposed to squat on land that did not rightly belong to her."[60] Moreover, both failed to respect "the mysterious character of religious truth, whose object was impossible of human definition."[61] Petre quoted from Loisy's Modernist *Livre inédit* (as summarized in Loisy's *Mémoires*) and his 1917 *La religion* to demonstrate his basic consistency on this point. "His quarrel with rationalistic theology," she summarized, "as with ratio-

[57] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 62–63.
[58] Ibid. 63. See also Petre, "Alfred Loisy, 1857–1940" 9–10.
[59] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 64. [60] Ibid. 76.
[61] Ibid. 77.

nalistic science, was that both ignored or deformed faith."[62] Again, "theology failed in so far as she claimed to be science, science failed in its attempt to take the place of theology. And faith survived both."[63] In the name of his mystical faith, Loisy fought intellectual presumption: first in its theological form while a member of the Church, and then in its scientific forms after his excommunication. On this point, Petre claimed, he never changed.

Finally Petre turned to Loisy's mystical faith itself. As distinguished from rationalistic theology or science, Loisy thought of religious faith as the means by which human beings could apprehend transcendent reality. The faith that Loisy defended was a *via negativa*, proceeding first by negation. Thus he attacked any effort to define the transcendent, and, in Petre's words, his "refusal to define" led to a "refusal to affirm" anything constructive about God. Nevertheless, "neither refusal [to define or to affirm] should be classed as denial [of the transcendent]." Loisy was no atheist. On the contrary, he "was convinced of a spiritual reality which transcended sense and reason, which was apprehended, but not defined, by the faith of mankind; and he asked for no definitions; he thought, indeed, that definitions were often destructive of spiritual faith."[64] His opposition to "the exaggerated claims of the human reason," in the form of either theological or scientific definitions, stemmed precisely from his understanding of faith as the only true "spiritual antennae, responding to unseen and undefined reality."[65]

This view of religious faith preserved Loisy's hope for the future of humanity even after he gave up all hope for the Catholic Church. Petre quoted Loisy as saying that "no great work can be accomplished in this world save by those with faith in mankind." She added that "religion is nothing else than faith in mankind, which implies faith in something higher and greater than mankind, but present to mankind."[66] Loisy himself retained this faith and worked to realize it in the world. Hence the "persistent post-war preoccupation of his mind with the spiritual needs of mankind" and his desire to work "to the end at the task of spiritual regeneration."[67]

Although Loisy had abandoned his Modernist hopes and left the Catholic Church, he continued to wrestle with exactly the same questions that had informed his Modernist program. He insisted on intellectual integrity

[62] Ibid. 79.

[63] Ibid. 82. In *Modernism* 53–54 and her obituary of Loisy, "Alfred Loisy, 1857–1940" 11, she made the same point about clarifying the relationship of history, theological authority, and faith in her assessment of Loisy's ongoing religious significance.

[64] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 87.

[65] Ibid. 89, 99.

[66] Ibid. 103.

[67] Ibid. 105, 108.

in all critical scholarship, and he fought against those who threatened it, whether from a Christian or a rationalistic perspective. At the same time, he insisted that critical scholars respect the limits of their discipline—they could not pronounce on the legitimacy of religious faith any more than could theologians. Loisy insisted on this limit in order to defend the integrity of religious faith, and he defended religious faith out of loyalty to an indefinable but nonetheless real transcendent. His faith in this transcendent reality gave him hope for the future of humankind despite all the contrary evidence being amassed during the first half of the 20th century. Loisy's ongoing religious faith and hope, coupled with his commitment to historical scholarship, gave his post-Christian writings their significance for any person struggling with the relationship of critical scholarship and religious faith, no matter their religious affiliation.

CONCLUSIONS

Petre concluded her book with the summary chapter, "The Significance of Loisy," in which she enumerated the four points of greatest interest to her, all relating to the central question of the relationship between religious meaning and scientific fact. First, she noted, Loisy conceived of the New Testament as catechetical rather than historical. This conception of the New Testament had apologetic potential for the Church, which Loisy himself had only begun to develop when he was excommunicated. More importantly, it helped to clarify the proper relationship of the teaching authority of the Church to critical scholarship. The Church had to recognize that it was "ever working from facts it has not created to the creation of life and truth that are based on those facts. . . . If criticism did raise its voice on such matters [as the religious truth found in the facts], then the Church had every right to beat it down by her own weapons." At the same time, the Church had to accept "her own limitations in the field of human knowledge."[68] After all, the Church did not create the facts themselves.

The second and third points were closely related. Loisy, she continued, repudiated "all artificial myth making; that is to say . . . the myth that is not an effort at the comprehension of truth, but a substitute for truth."[69] This point was a function of Loisy's critical integrity; he would not tolerate people substituting their ideas about what should have been for the historical facts themselves. He did not reject efforts to draw from the facts a religious significance, but he rejected using religious (or areligious) assumptions to determine what the facts were. Petre's third point, concerning Loisy's treatment of the person of Christ, was a particular, and particularly

[68] Ibid. 112–13.

[69] Ibid. 114.

important, example of her second on artificial myth-making.[70] On the one hand, Loisy challenged Christians for creating Jesus in their own image. On the other hand, he fought those who denied that Jesus ever existed.[71] Against both forms of misrepresentation, Loisy insisted on taking seriously the facts that critics could determine about the historical Jesus.

Fourth, Petre praised Loisy's "resolute effort to urge on men the spiritual character of the universe, and their own spiritual needs."[72] Loisy had too much intellectual integrity to tolerate distortions of the historical record, but his enduring religious significance was rooted in his enduring religious vision. Despite his negations, Petre insisted, Loisy was a man of faith who dedicated himself to defending the integrity of religious faith against the threats of theological and scientific rationalism in order to preserve the possibility that human beings could genuinely apprehend the transcendent and thus maintain hope for a better world.

Such was the religious significance that Petre claimed to find in Loisy's work. But, one may ask, what about the historical significance of her representation of Loisy? What does she tell us about him and about Modernism more generally? As I have shown, she emphasized his enduring religious commitment and interpreted his critical work in light of it. She did not downplay the importance of purely critical questions for Loisy, but she noted that "his first interest in exegesis was definitely religious; and [that] his critical work was intended for the use and enlightenment of Catholic students." "Even in those [later] critical works there is a religious spirit at work."[73] Petre thus challenged those who had portrayed Loisy after his excommunication as an atheist or even as a merely technical scholar. Critical scholarship was obviously important to Loisy, but, Petre suggested, his religious commitments provided the context within which his critical scholarship had meaning. Moreover, this was as true of Loisy after his excommunication as before.

In addition to shedding light on Loisy's later works of apparently pure scholarship, Petre's emphasis on Loisy's enduring religious commitment has implications reaching back into his Modernist period. Most obviously, it challenges Houtin's portrayal of Loisy as a faithless priest motivated solely by ambition. Houtin's biography of Loisy had not been published when Petre wrote her book, and she does not appear in her book to be

[70] Petre called "the Christological problem" "the culminating point of the historical problem" (*Modernism* 83–84). See also Petre, "A Comment on M. Loisy's Articles," *Hibbert Journal* 36 (1937–1938) 530–33.

[71] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 114.

[72] Ibid. See also Petre, "Alfred Loisy, 1857–1940" 13–14; and "Loisy's Autobiography" 663–64.

[73] Petre, *Alfred Loisy* 109.

attempting a defense of Loisy's character. But her contention that Loisy's publications exhibited a genuinely religious faith even after his excommunication surely implies that the published affirmations of faith from his Catholic period were similarly genuine. And her explanation of Loisy's opposition to orthodox teaching as stemming precisely from his religious faith seems more plausible than Houtin's picture of Loisy as a perfect fraud.

Finally, Petre's emphasis on Loisy's religious faith and his efforts to integrate religious faith and critical scholarship draws attention to a different set of his works than are often studied. In her analysis of his thought from his Modernist period, she focused on his *Livre inédit* and stated in her conclusion, "I do not think this earlier phase of life and thought can be properly understood without a study of the first volume of his *Mémoires*, in which he gives a synopsis" of it.[74] More strikingly still, she privileged Loisy's later, more philosophical works over his Modernist writings. One would expect Petre, a devout if sometimes discontented Catholic and arguably the last surviving Modernist from the earlier period, to emphasize Loisy's Catholic Modernist writings more than his post-Catholic work. The fact that she did not should inspire contemporary scholars to take more seriously Loisy's later work than has normally been the case.

Most important of all is the implication of Petre's emphasis on Loisy's later, more philosophical work. She claimed that Loisy once told her that his later books on the philosophy of religion were "the result of deeper mind and heart searching than what we may call his professional output."[75] Perhaps we should consider Loisy a philosopher of religion as much as a biblical critic. If so, we can then project this understanding of the later Loisy back on to the earlier Loisy. Petre, at least, gives us warrant to do so. Loisy, she said, "passed through phases in which personal suffering obscured the clearness of his vision. . . . But through all ran an unbroken thread of religious faith and belief, and the Loisy who died in 1940 was nearer the Loisy of early priesthood than to the storm-tossed Loisy of the Modernist period."[76] If she is right on this point, then Loisy's latest works can shed light on his much earlier religious vocation. Petre acknowledged that this suggestion was merely an opinion, but she could have added that it was the opinion of one who had shared Loisy's early hopes and subsequent suffering, as well as many years of friendship. It is, therefore, an opinion worth taking seriously.

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid. 76.
[76] Ibid. 4.