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Misunderstood Mystic: An Analysis of Alfred Loisy's Un Mythe Apologetique

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MISUNDERSTOOD MYSTIC: AN ANALYSIS OF
ALFRED LOISY'S UN MYTHE APOLOGETIQUE

by

Patricia Prendergast

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

May

1980

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Finally, for his patience, good humor and ability to distract me with his wonderful absurdities, I thank my son, Benjamin.

VITA

Patricia Colling Prendergast was born August 3, 1941 in Plainfield, New Jersey. She received her elementary education at a one-room schoolhouse in Mountainville, New Jersey and at Evergreen and Hartridge Schools in Plainfield. Her secondary education was obtained from Marymount School in Tarrytown, New York from which she was graduated in 1959.

That same year she entered the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary and began studying at Marymount College where she majored in drama. In May of 1963 she received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with honors. While at Marymount she was on scholarship and was chosen to be one of thirteen in the first Interdepartmental Honors Seminar there. She was also awarded a New York State Graduate Fellowship.

The following three and a half years were spent teaching at St. John's School in McLean, Virginia and at Sacred Heart of Mary High School in Rolling Meadows, Illinois. She became Chairman of the Religion department at Sacred Heart of Mary High School in 1965, and in 1966 was asked to be on the Archdiocesan Board of Religious Education in Chicago.

After leaving the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary in 1967, she was Head of Theatre Arts at Brown Ledge Camp in Vermont. From there she went to Ireland where she spent the next five years

directing plays and teaching at the English Language Institute and the Dublin Language Institute.

In 1970 she received a Master of Arts with honors in Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama from University College Dublin. In 1977 she began studying Theology at St. Louis University. The following September she was awarded an assistantship in Theology at Loyola University of Chicago. In March, 1980 she was inducted into Theta Alpha Kappa and in April of the same year, into Alpha Sigma Nu. She was awarded the degree of Master of Arts in Theology in May, 1980.

She has been awarded a Fellowship by Northwestern University where she will begin doctoral studies in September, 1980.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study of Alfred Loisy's Un Mythe Apologétique¹ is no mere exercise in historical research. It has been undertaken in the conviction that Loisy has much to say to contemporary theology and in order to contribute to the righting of some historical wrongs committed against him by his co-religionists. One of these wrongs is the common assumption that he was an atheist.² It is my purpose to show that Loisy was not an atheist but a mystic. In addition I hope to be able to extract from Un Mythe the outlines of his apologetics, to show that it is based on his mysticism, to suggest that it has something to offer fundamental theology and that it merits further scholarship.

The method I am employing is a kind of "layered" analysis which became necessary both because of the nature of Un Mythe and that of the inquiry. Since the book is a response to another work it, not surprisingly, receives its form from that work and reflects

¹Paris: Nourry, 1939. For the sake of simplicity the title will often be abbreviated Un Mythe.

²This statement from L. A. Bushinski, "Loisy, Alfred," The New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp. 972-73 is representative of many others: "He (Loisy) traced everything to a crisis of faith 29 years before his formal excommunication (1886): although practicing his priesthood, he was a complete atheist." The statement is as inaccurate as the arithmetic.

the mind that produced it. It is Loisy's mind, however, that is the concern of this study so, while I felt it necessary to indicate the form, I did not wish to remain bound by its limitations which often obscured the fundamental issues with which the study is involved. The method is intended to reveal the source of Un Mythe by a gradual exposition first, of the external structure of the book; secondly, of the philosophical tension between opposing apologetics which lies beneath its surface; and thirdly, of the mysticism which characterizes Loisy's apologetics and which really provoked, not only Un Mythe, but his life's work.

In endeavoring to arrive at a reasonable assessment of the career of Alfred Loisy, it is necessary to be exceptionally discerning with reference to the available evidence and the character of those supplying it.¹ The single most important influence on history's treatment of Loisy has been his condemnation by Rome. That condemnation, expressed in the decree Lamentabili² and the encyclical

¹In a paper delivered at a meeting of the American Academy of Religion in November, 1979, Ronald Burke of the University of Nebraska gives a helpful, though necessarily brief, overview of the major studies of Loisy: "Loisy's Faith: Landshift in Catholic Thought," pp. 148-75 of the compiled papers of the Working Group on Catholic Modernism. See also the introduction and first three chapters of Alec Vidler's A Variety of Catholic Modernists (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) for background on some of Loisy's critics. Emil Poulat offers some illuminating insights on personality differences between Loisy and Houtin which may be of assistance in assessing the latter's Vie de Loisy in Alfred Loisy: Sa Vie-Son Oeuvre, ed. and annotated by Emil Poulat (Paris: Editions du centre national de la Recherche scientifique, 1960).

²Pius X. Decretum "Lamentabili sane exitu," Acta Sanctae Sedis, t. 40 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1907), pp. 470-78.

Pascendi¹ was consummated in his excommunication in 1908,² and made even more effective by the Oath against Modernism.³ It is no wonder that, until very recently, Roman Catholic scholars either assiduously avoided the entire subject or allowed their perceptions of Modernism and Loisy to be deeply colored by the Roman position which unequivocally anathematized them both. The negative response elicited by the mention of Alfred Loisy which one receives from many Roman Catholic clergymen and theologians is understandable when one examines the encyclopedia articles and books that have been available to them. However, if one reviews articles and books written on Loisy before 1908 or the writings of Anglicans unperturbed by Roman disciplinary actions, or the recent work of some Roman Catholic scholars, a more positive assessment of the man and his work emerges.

My interest in Loisy dates from a reading of his L'Evangile et l'Eglise (1902) and subsequent encounters with secondary literature

¹Pius X. Encyclical "Pascendi dominici gregis," Acta Sanctae Sedis, t. 40 (Rome: Ex Typographia Poliglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1907), pp. 593-650.

²See Un Mythe, p. 123 for Loisy's explanation for the time lapse between the Church's decision to exterminate Modernism and the official condemnations.

³The Oath against Modernism is contained in the motu proprio Sacrorum antistitum of Pius X (September 1, 1910). Since its publication it has been required of clerics before the subdiaconate, confessors, preachers, religious superiors, seminary professors, pastors, canons, benefice holders, officials in Roman congregations, and episcopal curias. See J. J. Heaney, "Oath Against Modernism" in The New Catholic Encyclopedia, pp. 995-96. Although the Oath has never been revoked, since this article was written, a profession of faith has been required of deacons, priests, seminary educators, etc. which replaces it without including the Modernist material.

with which I simply could not agree. The promptings of intuition forced me to do a great deal more reading of Loisy himself, finally resulting in the desire to write this thesis. It has been more than gratifying to discover contemporary Catholic scholars who share my interest and some of my enthusiasm for the possibilities inherent in Loisy's thought, possibilities which may at last bear fruit in and for the Church.¹

If one surveys the vast array of subjects with which Loisy concerns himself² one might well wonder why an individual should single out Un Mythe Apologétique for attention. Why not an exegetical work since he was primarily and fundamentally an exegete? Exegesis led him to study the origins of religion among the Israelites and to pursue comparative studies in the history of religious develop-

¹The work of the eminent French scholar, Emil Poulat, is of primary importance in the shifting perspectives on Loisy. His exhaustive and wide-ranging studies of Modernism have prepared the way for the re-examination of the topic on scholarly rather than polemical grounds. In particular his edition of Houtin's and Sartiaux's works as well as that of Henri Bremond's pseudonymous Un clerc qui n'a pas trahi, have called attention to these primary sources for an understanding of Loisy and have illuminated them by his notes. The climate created by Vatican II must not be overlooked either, for the Council must be credited with having accomplished many of the aims of the Modernists. The extent to which the prevailing intellectual winds are shifting can be gauged by the fact that the following is an excerpt from a paper given by a Roman Catholic scholar:

Was Alfred Loisy an atheist or a harbinger of contemporary Catholic faith? Prior to forsaking the efforts of Catholic Modernists to reform the Church, was he already an apostate and a deceit as a priest? Or was he more a prototype of the intellectually honest and institutionally acceptable faith for Catholics in a post-Vatican II era?

(from Burke's paper cited in n. 2, p. 1, above).

²See Poulat, Alfred Loisy: Sa Vie-Son Oeuvre, pp. 303-409 for the most complete listing of Loisy's works to date.

ment. Why not choose a topic from that constellation of investigations? The choice was made because of a conviction that Loisy was, in his depths, an apologist; because of a sense that the term as applied to him needed clarification; and because Un Mythe Apologétique,¹ being the last book he wrote,¹ might offer an especially valuable perspective on his apologetics.

Of Loisy's over 263 books and articles catalogued by Emil Poulat, only six have been translated into English.² The only one of these receiving much scholarly attention was L'Évangile et l'Église since it (and Autour d'un petit livre which clarified it) provoked the official condemnations both of Modernism and of Loisy. Thus it is easy to understand the widespread ignorance of the bulk of his work in the English-speaking world and the reason why his apologetics is almost exclusively associated with L'Évangile et l'Église. Since, however, he wrote far more after its publication than before, and since his later work might conceivably bear the marks of maturer thought, one might reasonably conclude that, far from being his definitive position as an apologist, L'Évangile et

¹It was published in 1939, a year before he died.

²The six books are: L'Évangile et l'Église, first translated by Christopher Home as The Gospel and the Church (London: Isbister, 1903); Choses Passées, translated by Richard W. Boynton as My Duel with the Vatican (New York: Dutton and Co., 1924); Guerre et Religion, translated by Rev. A. Galton as The War and Religion (Oxford: Blackwell, 1915); Mors et Vita, translated in the American review The Truth Seeker, May 19 and 26 and June 2 and 9 of 1917; La Naissance du Christianisme, translated by L. P. Jacks as The Birth of the Christian Religion (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948); and Les Origines du Nouveau Testament, translated by L. P. Jacks as The Origins of the New Testament (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950).

L'Eglise was merely a point on the continuum of his apologetics, and that a later work could shed light, not only on his mature position, but on the earlier as well.

Background of Un Mythe

Loisy explains in the "Avant-propos" to Un Mythe that in early December of 1938 he received a fascicule with three titles indicating that it was one section of a larger work entitled Cours de philosophie religieuse à l'usage du temps présent. The subsection of which the fascicule was a part was called La Pensée Moderne et Catholicisme and the fascicule itself was Parallèles. Renan et Newman. He was especially struck by the dedication:

A. M. Loisy, cet essai inachevé, en reconnaissance pour le fidèle envoi de ses livres, et avec l'espérance qu'il se reconnaitra plus en Newman qu'en Renan.

Sérapion,
15 nov. 38.¹

Since this dedication does not appear in the published version, it was presumably handwritten in Loisy's and functions as a clue to the purpose, not only of Parallèles. Renan et Newman, but to that of the complete La Pensée Moderne et le Catholicisme as well. It also furnished Loisy with the identity of the author since the book was published anonymously.

Sérapion (more correctly Sarapion) was the name of an Egyptian bishop, a close friend of both Saints Antony and Athanasius. His prayer-book,² written around the middle of the fourth century,

¹Un Mythe, p. 6.

²John Wordsworth, D.D., ed., Bishop Sarapion's Prayer-Book (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1899).

was only discovered at the end of the nineteenth. It was considered a liturgical document of great importance and its author was revealed as a champion of orthodoxy.¹ Loisy, in the introduction to the second part of La Crise morale du temps present et l'éducation humaine,² used "Sérapion" as a designation for Jean Guitton:

En tout ce livre, je désignerai notre auteur sous le nom de Sérapion, estimant qu'il a retenu, nonobstant la distance des siècles, la mentalité de son prototype.³

This "mentality" included a tendency toward anthropomorphism⁴ as well as a marked orthodoxy.

So the author of this anonymously published work with the intriguing dedication was Jean Guitton⁵ who was, in employing the name "Sérapion," accepting Loisy's characterization of him as a champion of orthodoxy and, thus, an opponent. Was there an implied challenge in the sending of the fascicule and in the purpose of La Pensée Moderne et le Catholicisme? Further investigation convinced Loisy that there was. For in January of 1939 Loisy read in Le Temps présent that La Pensée Moderne et le Catholicisme had been published so far in four fascicules and was indeed by Jean Guitton. The order of their publication, however, differed significantly from the order in which they were meant to be read. According to the latter, the first book was Perspectives (1938); the second,

¹Ibid. See Introduction, pp. 7-23.

²(Paris: Nourry, 1937). This was the fifteenth and last of the "petits livres rouges."

³Un Mythe, p. 6.

⁴Ibid.

⁵See Chapter II below for more details about Guitton.

Parallèles, Renan et Newman (1938); the third, La Pensée de M. Loisy (1935-1936); and the last, Critique de la Critique (1936-1937). Thus, if the fascicules were written in the order of their publication, the one on Loisy's thought was first.

This being the case, one could suspect that the purpose of La Pensée Moderne was to offer an orthodox rebuttal to "Loisyism" in the hope of permanently laying to rest the ghosts of Modernism.

Loisy's response to the challenge as he perceives it is both personal and universal. He feels the need to justify himself, certainly:

Je vais tâcher de m'expliquer en termes courtois sur ce nouvel apologiste que l'Eglise catholique vient de recruter en France; sur ce qu'il a pensé nous apprendre touchant la religion de Renan et celle de Newman; sur l'aspect biblique du problème religieux et principalement des origines chrétiennes; sur l'aspect historique et philosophique de ce problème. Je ne prétends pas, moi, apporter le dernier mot sur le problème dont il s'agit, mais je ne reconnais à personne le droit de fausser la signification morale de mon témoignage, qui est aussi bien celle de ma vie.¹

But something more urgent and more profound provokes his final apology: human salvation.

Et puis, à l'heure présente, il s'agit bien de nous! Les questions qui nous ont préoccupés mûrissent maintenant toutes seules, ou du moins sans nous: sans Sérapion, qui n'a pas pris le temps de les approfondir; sans moi, que les infirmités paralysent de plus en plus, et qui, en vérité, n'ai jamais fait autre chose que d'indiquer une orientation dans laquelle la spiritualité de toutes les religions pourrait se rejoindre et les sauver elles-mêmes, contribuant en même temps au véritable salut de l'humanité.²

¹Un Mythe, pp. 10-11. The underlining in this and all subsequent quotations is the author's, not mine.

²Ibid., pp. 184-85.

Some Stylistic and Formal Remarks

While Un Mythe is, superficially, a counter-attack on Sérapion, it is far more. It is actually an apologetic for an apologetics. It is Loisy's defense of his own defense of religion. It is not, as was L'Évangile et l'Église, an attempt to justify the Roman church, nor is it even an apologetic for Christianity. For Loisy realized that the powers and principalities against which the modern apologist must wrestle were attacking the very foundations of belief.¹

Sources treating of apologetics agree in tracing the etymology of the word to the Greek απολογία² meaning defense or excuse in the legal sense of pleading a cause. The specific cause with which the term has been commonly associated has been that of Christianity responding to sieges from without and within. Since the Reformation it has been dominated by the desire to justify the Roman church as

¹Although the effort to defend the faith is as old as the faith itself, the science of apologetics only arose in the nineteenth century spearheaded by Schleiermacher and von Drey. Fundamental theology is another name for this ancient effort, but the change in name indicates a change in the function of that effort or, rather, a change in our perception of it. It is now seen as central and foundational to theology and is directed not to the unbeliever or the heterodox (ad extra) but to the believer (ad intra). See Johannes-Baptist Metz, "Apologetics" in Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 20-24.

²Also see X. M. Bachelet, S.J., "Apologétique," in Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi, Tome II (4th ed.) A. d'Alès, ed. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1925), pp. 190-251; Charles F. Aiken, "Apologetics," in The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. I (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), pp. 618-23; and L. Maisonneuve, "Apologétique" in Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, A. Vacant, E. Mangenot, E. Amann, eds., Tome I-2^{de} partie (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1931), pp. 1511-79.

against its reformed counterparts and vice-versa. More recently, though, since the Enlightenment, another facet of apologetics has emerged, one more basic than either a defense of Christianity or of one of its particular historical expressions. For the Enlightenment called into question not merely Christianity or a sect but the very impulse to religion. It is this last, most fundamental form of apologetics which Loisy's most resembles.

If Un Mythe is an "apologetic for an apologetics," a defense of a defense, it is an offensive one. It is offensive in the sense that it takes the form of an attack on Sérapion-Guitton who symbolizes the Roman Catholic apologist of Loisy's time, and, until relatively recently, of our own. Apparently Loisy felt that for the real issues troubling religion to emerge, the obfuscatory "defenders of the faith" had to be attacked as part of the problem rather than accepted as contributors to its solution.

Some may consider the book offensive in another sense, mistaking the tone in which it is written. It is a book which takes its subject matter seriously but views the confrontation with Sérapion with supreme amusement. At times I have imagined Loisy subtitling Sérapion's work In Which Pooh Tries to Catch a Heffalump for he takes immense pleasure in illustrating the times Sérapion tumbles into his own carefully engineered traps. Un Mythe is really a very funny book which Loisy obviously hopes his readers will enjoy (at the expense of Jean Guitton, to be sure, but from Loisy's point of view, Guitton's ignorance is inexcusable).

On attend généralement que les gens soient morts pour narrer l'histoire de leur âme. Mon insupportable longévité aurait-elle lassé la patience de mes biographes empressés? Je croirai plutôt que le zèle de Sérapion lui a fait opposer une barrière et un remède à la contagion de ma littérature. Mais son traquenard à prendre les hérétiques, ayant été hâtivement et artificiellement construit, Sérapion pourrait bien finalement n'y attraper que lui-même.¹

One may well entertain a question as to the worth of a debate between two such unequal opponents² to which I must reply with another question. How else could Loisy effectively counter the prevailing apologetic of the Roman church? A debate must deal with particulars if it is to resolve anything and the arrival of Sérapion's fascicule provided a perfect opportunity for such a debate. Un Mythe is not a personal vendetta being carried on against Guitton; I hope the succeeding chapters will show that it receives its energy more from the profound religious convictions of its author than from any desire to see Guitton squirm. Loisy saw apologists of Guitton's ilk crippling the religious advance of mankind in which its only hope of a future lies.

The form of Un Mythe does not lend itself readily to the kind of analysis being undertaken. It too often partakes of the shadows and abstractions it purports to combat, dealing rather diffusely with its subject matter. However I thought it necessary to indicate that form in the second chapter so that the process of analysis would thereby become more understandable and the conflict more apparent. Chapter III deals with the precipitates of Chapter

¹Un Mythe, pp. 94-95.

²See Chapter II below for an idea of their inequality.

II, and Chapter IV, with those of Chapter III. By proceeding in this fashion I have hoped to retain a sense of Un Mythe as Loisy wrote it while, at the same time, gradually revealing under the surface action those deeper motivations and grounds which endow both the book and the conflict with their significance.

What precisely was Loisy so anxious to defend? I believe the analysis of Un Mythe as well as the thrust of his entire oeuvre show him to be an apologist for God (le Mystère), for faith, for the future of man. The question of his orthodoxy is not within the scope of this paper. In fact it is hardly a question at all.

For Alfred Loisy was decidedly unorthodox.

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURAL OVERVIEW

Un Mythe is, ostensibly, a duel between the apologetics of Sérapion and that of Loisy. It is, in fact a return match since the original took place on Sérapion's ground in La Pensée Moderne et le Catholicisme. This one also takes place on Sérapion's ground in the sense that the form of Un Mythe is dictated by the subject matter and the approach of Sérapion in his first four fascicules: Perspectives; Parallèles. Renan et Newman; La Pensée de M. Loisy; and Critique de la Critique.

What is most characteristic of Loisy's response to Sérapion is its tendency toward the radical: origins, the root of the matter. He organizes his material almost imperceptibly about the roots of his quarrel with Sérapion. And his offensive strikes first at the basis of his opponent's argumentation: the very capability of the latter to engage in the debate. Chapter I, "Un Apologiste de l'Eglise" is aimed directly at the person of Jean Guittou in the hope that his credibility will be demolished and his entire apologetic edifice weakened thereby. The second chapter, "Renan et Newman," sets out to destroy the parallel Sérapion has set up between the two men in order to insure a total collapse of Sérapion's oppositional reasoning based on it and carried on in his hypothesis of the two methods which Loisy attacks in Chapter III, "Un Hérésiarque

Involontaire." The fourth chapter, "Une Hérésie Mal Comprise," continues the offensive begun in the previous chapter against Sérapion's La Pensée de M. Loisy. It is his final apology revealing, with unmistakable clarity, the mysticism on which his religious perspective is founded.

Reductio ad absurdum

"Un Apologiste de l'Eglise," the first phase of Loisy's offensive defense, is a reversal of the argument from authority which destroys Sérapion's credibility by exposing his weak background in the fields on which he has chosen to do battle. There is also an implicit contrast between Sérapion's limited comprehension of exegesis and the history of religions with Loisy's erudition in those fields.

M. Guitton's curriculum vitae includes the following: he was, until shortly before the publication of the work under review when he was appointed to a post at the University of Montpellier, a secondary school teacher. His works included a doctoral thesis on time and eternity relevant to Plotinus and Augustine (1933) and a thesis on Newman's idea of development in the same year. In 1937 he published an exegetical work on the Canticle of Canticles which favored the traditional allegorical approach. In three little paperback volumes (1936-1938) he published a biography of P. Pouget whose disciple he was. (His other "homme limite" was Père Lagrange with whom he studied in Jerusalem). He also wrote a book on vocations and several articles.¹

¹Un Mythe, pp. 13-17.

Loisy does not mention his own output, feeling, perhaps, that his readers will be only too familiar with his prolixity and the substantial nature of his works. Since he is largely unknown to the English-speaking world, however, it may be helpful to mention a few of these works to illustrate the David-Goliath nature of this intellectual combat: Histoire du Canon de l'Ancien Testament (1890); Histoire du Canon du Nouveau Testament (1891); Les Mythes Chaldéens de la Création et du Déluge (1892); Les Evangiles synoptiques (1893); (t. II, 1896); Les Mythes babyloniens et les premiers chapîtres de la Genèse (1901); La Religion d'Israël (1901); Jésus et la tradition évangélique (1910); A propos d'Histoire des religions (1911); La Religion (1917); Les Mystères paiens et le Mystère chrétien (1919); La Naissance du Christianisme (1933).

In addition to writing commentaries on nearly all the books of the New Testament, he translated them from the Greek into French. He wrote a series of fifteen "petits livres rouges" having to do with L'Evangile et l'Eglise and the controversy it engendered as well as with contemporary religious questions. There was also a constant and prodigious flow of articles on various topics, for example: "Le dernier fragment du Iashar"; "L'Apocalypse synoptique"; "L'Espérance méssianique d'après Ernest Renan"; "Le sanctuaire de Baal-Péor"; "Le commentaire de St. Jérôme sur Daniel (I et II)."¹

¹See n. 2, p. 4, above for Poulat's bibliography which gives a more comprehensive idea of the nature and scope of Loisy's oeuvre.

Attack on Sérapion's Biblical Foundations

The second and third sections of Chapter I attack the Old and New Testament foundations of Sérapion's apologetics, whose remarks on the characteristics of Old Testament religion are preceded by: "Veuillez donc écouter ce petit résumé que je vais vous faire, et qui n'a d'autre mérite que d'être exact."¹ Such smugness invites the devastating response that follows. When Sérapion assumes that his readers know what the religions of the ancient world were and then asserts that all save one were contrary to the exigencies of reason or morality,² Loisy hits hard at his opponent's ignorance of prehistory, his apparent assignment of a date to the creation of the universe, and in general, his somewhat fundamentalist acceptance of the Genesis account as approximating history. Since the God of the Israelites made his appearance fairly late in history, Loisy asks: "Quelle aurait, dans l'hypothèse, été auparavant en ce bas monde l'action du Dieu de Sérapion? N'aura-t-il donné aucun signe de vie dans les âges préhistoriques?"³

He next makes the point that among the religions of the ancient world are those of China and India, religions of highly cultivated and civilized peoples. Can one assume that they are "contrary to the exigencies of reason or morality" when they have survived for such a long time and have resisted, for the most part, the incursions of the Judaeo-Christian tradition? True, they may not

¹Un Mythe, p. 17.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 19.

conform to Sérapion's ideas of what is reasonable or moral, but since his ideas are not absolute there exists the possibility that those religions do conform, in some way, to reason and morality.¹

What follows is the demolition of Sérapion's "save one." Loisy asks if the Old Testament God fully satisfies our ideas of reason and morality when he arbitrarily chooses one people for himself out of all the inhabitants of the earth or asks the sacrifice of his only son from Abraham.

To the conventional apologetic which extols the Israelite religion as uniquely monotheistic, Loisy responds with the now fairly well-accepted view that Yahweh was originally a tribal god:

Iahvé était le patron d'Israël, un patron assez jaloux, comme le soit volontiers tous les dieux nationaux, chacun tenant à garder pour lui sa clientèle (cf. supr., p. 19, n. 1). C'est seulement avec le temps, et la moralisation du Dieu grandissant avec son prestige, que Iahvé devint effectivement, pour ses fidèles, le seul Dieu de l'univers, les dieux des nations étant ravalés au rang d'esprits subalternes, voire se mauvais esprits, ou bien identifiés à leurs images cultuelles, étant considérés comme inexistantes, pierre et bois, dont on avait fait des dieux en les taillant et en les ornant.²

In the third section of the chapter, Loisy hopes to accomplish a feat parallel to the one attempted in the second, but in this case it is Sérapion's New Testament base which is under attack. This section is notably longer, and with reason: it bears more directly on the Christianity Sérapion is defending.

Sérapion's introduction of Christ into history is dramatic, to say the least,³ requiring Loisy to note that, far from his

¹Ibid., see pp. 19-20.

²Ibid., pp. 21-22.

³"Un homme parut enfin.

Il appartient à l'histoire, et nous savons, par les

suddenly appearing among a people "qui pratiquait la loi morale mieux qu'aucune autre," Christ came to a nation constantly reproached for its refractory behavior and one which exhibited a variety of contradictory interpretations of Judaism at the time of his appearance.¹ To Sérapion's endeavors at showing the uniqueness of Jesus, Loisy opposes remarks calculated to emphasize his Jewishness and his debt to the tradition out of which he came. Much of the rest of this initial criticism consists in Loisy's pointing out the empty rhetoric and the inexactitude of the unsupported statements which flow with apparent ease from Sérapion's pen.

Illogicalities

Having struck at Sérapion's credentials and his Scriptural foundation, Loisy now attacks his reasoning. The fourth section of Chapter I is devoted to pointing out flaws in Sérapion's philosophy and logic. In the process of ridiculing a somewhat simplistic presentation of Christianity's position in the modern world, Loisy gives us a glimpse of the vision which prompts Un Mythe. Sérapion has stated: ". . . et, malgré ses divisions dans les temps modernes, il (Christianity) devint, avec ses colonies et ses expansions, la tête et le coeur de l'humanité":

A l'heure présente, il semblerait plutôt qu'une grande partie se joue dans laquelle est engagé l'avenir de tous les peuples, de toutes les civilisations, de toutes les religions. Aussi bien cette crise, en ce qui concerne les christianismes, est-

témoignages, qu'il était un petit, un simple, un ouvrier, fils d'ouvrier." Ibid., p. 23.

¹Ibid., p. 24.

elle commencée depuis plusieurs siècles. Mais elle a pris un caractère beaucoup plus aigu, non seulement parce que les Etats dits démocratiques professent la liberté de conscience en matière de religion, . . . mais parce que les Etats dits totalitaires repudient ouvertement ou implicitement toute forme de christianisme. . . . Or, cette crise des religions, qui sévit aussi bien à l'intérieur de toutes les confessions chrétiennes, n'est qu'un aspect de la crise générale qui, dans l'ordre politique et économique, soulève les peuples les uns contre les autres dans une mêlée grosse de catastrophes peut-être irréparables.

Où sont, maintenant, Sérapion "la tête et le coeur de l'humanité"?
Y avez-vous bien pensé? J'admets que le catholicisme soit un agent considérable dans l'armée de l'Esprit, mais êtes-vous certain que, s'il garde votre programme, il pourra définitivement enrayer la débacle des civilisations vieillissantes et empêcher la triomphe de la plus épouvantable barbarie qui ait jamais menacé le genre humain? N'est-il pas vrai que, si les religions veulent se sauver elles-mêmes, elles ont toutes besoin de s'élargir et de se spiritualiser de plus en plus dans leur croyance et dans leur action? Ainsi tendront-elles à se rejoindre et ainsi contribueront-elles à sauver réellement l'humanité.¹

The rest of this section is taken up with a number of small points made with the intent to show just how vacuous and void of meaning Sérapion's generalizations are. Having shown that the facts on which Sérapion rests his conclusions are not facts at all, or at least, not easily determinable as realities, Loisy is then bound to question those conclusions which lead inexorably to the necessity of entering the Roman church.² The chapter concludes with a discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of Sérapion's work: God exists; Miracles are possible; The soul is immortal.³ This section is treated in Chapter III below. It is enough to note here that it forms the heart of the third part of Loisy's first offensive.

¹ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

² Ibid., p. 33.

³ Ibid., p. 34.

At the end of "Un Apologiste de l'Eglise," Loisy hopes that he has delivered some body blows to Guittou's credibility as a scholar; to his knowledge of exegesis and the Scriptural foundations of belief; and finally to his logic. The chapter ends amid the scenery of the scientific age in which the earth is no longer the center of the universe. A new apologetics is necessary which will be at home in this enlarged universe since that of Sérapion (and all those he represents) lives still in a pre-Copernican cosmos. And this new apologetics must rest on a more sophisticated exegetical base as well as on a considerably more refined logic than the one exhibited by Sérapion. Loisy does not claim to have all the answers, but confesses that his life has been a search for solutions presented by the changing of the milieu in which the eternal questions are asked.¹

"Renan et Newman"

"Renan et Newman" is, of course a response to Parallèles. Renan et Newman. Loisy's purpose in this second chapter is to show that the comparison Sérapion makes between the two men is of doubtful validity. Such a demonstration is important to his program because, in knocking down the "parallel" he also destroys what the two men are made to symbolize: the two kinds of men; "immanentists" vs. "trans-

¹"Le problème de Dieu, le problème du monde, le problème de notre humanité terrestre et de son salut ont complètement changé d'aspect: il y faudrait, certes, des solutions plus nouvelles que les théories apologétiques de Sérapion. Il va sans dire que, ces solutions, je ne me flatte pas de les apporter ici; je n'ai guère fait autre chose durant toute ma vie que de les chercher." Ibid., p. 46.

cendentalists"; those who would adapt the Church to the modern world and those who prefer to accept the zeitgeist only insofar as it conforms to Church doctrines. The demonstration is also important as a preparation for Loisy's attack on the "keystone" of S erapion's endeavor: La Pens ee de M. Loisy.

Notons aussi que le fascicule qui me concerne est, historiquement parlant,   la base de toute cette construction apolog etique, et que ce qui est venu ensuite en est le compl ement. Je puis donc dire,--sans vanit  aucune,--que cette grande machine de guerre a  t  surtout dress e contre moi. . . . S erapion s'est propos  de me dissequer, sans peut- tre mesurer toutes les difficult s et inconvenients d'une op ration pratiqu e sur un  tre vivant.¹

In order to properly conduct his defense Loisy needs to do two things: to defend aspects of Renan's exegesis which coincide with his own and, at the same time, to point out the differences between them in order to extricate himself from identification with all of Renan's thought.

After attempting to show that the comparison is absurd, Loisy carried out his defense on two fronts: the philosophical and the exegetical. The philosophical will be touched on in Chapter III. A sample of the exegetical exchange follows.

When S erapion is appalled at Renan's reduction of the originality of the Israelite religion to a phenomenon of unconscious syncretism or reciprocal borrowing, Loisy asks whether he supposes that the Israelites developed their religion in a vacuum without borrowing from Babylonian tradition or some of the Canaanite cults. Aren't there certain New Testament writings (he does not indicate to

¹Ibid., p. 9.

which he is referring) which borrowed from pagan mythology and mysticism? And, wouldn't Sérapion admit that his own theology owed a great deal to Plato and Aristotle?¹

Sérapion charges that "les (Biblical) écrivains sont suspectés (by Renan) de superchérie et d'interpolations" and Loisy counters with examples: the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; the additions of Daniel (which he believes apocryphal anyway) in the Septaugint which were retained in the Vulgate; the redaction of the prologue to Acts.²

Sérapion objects to the application of methods used in criticizing legends to the Biblical narratives. Loisy responds that they are not treated as legends but as myths. Does Sérapion consider the creation narratives, the deluge, the tower of Babel, the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke (visibly constructed and reciprocally cancelling one another) as actual history?³ Sérapion also objects to the way Renan treats "développements" as "métamorphoses" and Loisy replies:

Distinguons: il y eut bien quelques métamorphoses dans les développements en question, par exemple, quand à l'idée simple et absolue du regne eschatologique de Dieu se substitua lentement, discrètement, celle de l'Eglise, à construire et organiser en ce monde. Cela fut une métamorphose, Sérapion, tout autant qu'un développement.⁴

The third section of the chapter, where Loisy examines the parallel he hopes he has shown to be absurd even in conception, is unutterably boring. It may be because Sérapion has had to exercise

¹Ibid., pp. 68-69.

²Ibid., pp. 70-71.

³Ibid., p. 71.

⁴Ibid., p. 72.

some tortuous reasoning on behalf of his parallel. Whatever the cause, since the material is not germane to the thesis, most of it will be lightly passed over.

In dealing with Newman's "Myself and My Creator," Loisy points out that it is neither official Catholicism nor "haut mysticisme" but a certain kind of liberal Protestantism traditionally expressed in the formula: "Dieu et l'âme, l'âme et son Dieu." He rejects the individualism of this formula as foreign to traditional Christianity which is always conscious of the community of believers and he opposes to it "haut mysticisme" in which the believer loses himself in God.¹

There follows a brief section on faith in which Loisy accuses Sérapion of changing the official teaching of the Church. It is of interest, not merely as a concrete example of the unofficial, but widespread teaching on faith that characterized the time between the Vatican Councils, but also as a contrast with Loisy's own view of faith which will appear in Chapter IV. Sérapion's definition of Catholic faith is as follows:

Dans la conception catholique, . . . la foi n'est point une création renouvelée à chaque instant par la volonté d'avoir confiance malgré tout, mais une habitude constante, une vertu continue, une soumission à ce qu'enseigne et à ce qu'est l'Eglise.²

Loisy opposes it first with Bossuet's Catéchisme du diocèse du Maux and then with the later Catéchisme du diocèse de Paris, 1890:

Qu'est-ce que la foi?
C'est une vertu et un don de Dieu par lequel nous croyons en

¹Ibid., p. 80.

²Ibid., p. 84.

lui, et tout ce qu'il a révélé à son Eglise.

Qu'est-ce que la foi?

La Foi est une vertu surnaturelle par laquelle nous croyons fermement toutes les vérités que Dieu a révélées et qu'il nous enseigne par son Eglise.¹

Loisy noted that, apart from a slight accentuation of the role of the Church as teacher, there is little difference in doctrine between the two catechisms. However, Sérapion's definition makes faith consist essentially in "soumission à ce qu'enseigne et à ce qu'est l'Eglise." All that is required in such a definition is obedience, submission to formula. Loisy suggests that while this is contrary to the catechisms he has quoted, it does conform to the practise of the contemporary Church. He cites his own experience with Rome in which nothing else was required of him beyond retraction of the opinions in his writings without reserve and unreserved subscription to official formulae. "Mais, au lieu de la foi, on a mis la soumission, et, à la place de Dieu, l'autorité ecclésiastique. Est-ce un progrès de la religion?"² Clearly Loisy is not objecting to the existence of the Church but rather to making a golden calf of her, substituting the Church for God. Rather than being anti-ecclesial, he is an apologist for God to the Church. If that sounds strange, one must consider that his writings were primarily intramural. He was convinced that the Church had an important role to play in the future of man, in the religion of the future. But he was equally convinced that in the condition in which he found her she was not equal to the task, and he objected strenuously

¹Ibid., p. 85.

²Ibid.

to the "totalitarianism" she was exhibiting.¹

If the parallel between Renan and Newman is not quite satisfactory, one more palatable between Loisy's attitude to Scripture and to the Church is emerging from the material. Loisy's exegetical studies led him to believe that Scripture needed to be liberated from the "myths" about it, from a false supernaturalism which endowed the Scriptures of the Judaeo-Christian tradition with unique and magical powers. So too, his studies in the history of religions, particularly that of Christianity, convinced him that the idea of the Church needed a similar demythologization. He does not say that the divine has not manifested itself in the Scriptures or in the Church, but rather that its manifestation is not solely confined to these avenues of expression and that, since God operates mysteriously rather than miraculously, our interpretation of religious history may need recasting in less magical concepts.

. . . les théologies ne sont que des mythologies plus ou moins abstraites. A cet égard, la position du judaïsme et du christianisme n'est pas essentiellement différente de celle des autres religions. Partout un arrière-fonds mythologique supporte les spéculations ultérieures, l'évolution imaginative et plus ou moins rationnelle des premiers songes. Le bouddhisme aussi, par exemple, fut transcendant à son milieu d'origine. En somme, l'horizon religieux de Sérapion est beaucoup trop étroit. Si Dieu travaille dans l'humanité il a travaillé et il travaille partout avec des réussites diverses, et l'histoire de ces réussites ne se confond pas avec le travail mystérieux qui y est sous-jacent.²

Hoping that his demolition of the Renan-Newman comparison has been successful (and that, in the process, some of his own positions have been elucidated), Loisy introduces us to the heart of Un

¹See *ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

Mythe: the last two chapters in which he is directly defending himself.

"Un Heresiarque Involontaire"

"An unwilling heresiarch . . ." This is the key to Loisy's position vis à vis the Church, a position which has baffled many of his critics. It is clear from his writings and from his letter to Pius X on February 28, 1904, that he wished to remain in the Church because he saw it as the irreplaceable agent of religious progress.¹ What has confused his orthodox colleagues is the difference between his perception of faith and theirs. For them, it was inconceivable that one who did not submit intellectually to all of the Church's teachings should wish to remain a part of her. But Loisy's faith, in so far as it partook of the absolute, was in "le grand Mystère," not in the Church or her doctrines, both of which he saw as relative and culturally conditioned.

The chapter reveals, through autobiographical details and the defense of many of his most attacked positions, the distance between Loisy and orthodoxy. It is something of a tour de force which includes an unarticulated plea for the inclusion of critics like himself in the Church. For orthodoxy appeared to him as the canonization of the status quo, the epitome of intellectual mediocrity, the regurgitation of undigested ideas.² After having studied

¹Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, Alfred Loisy entre la foi et l'incroyance (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1968), p. 83.

²"Vous trouverez peut-être, ami lecteur, que cette prose est dépourvue d'élégance, Je partage votre sentiment. Mais les

Sérapion's work which purports to represent orthodoxy, Loisy concludes:

. . . l'orthodoxisme est le pire ennemi de la vérité, de la vérité historique, de la vérité psychologique, de la vérité philosophique même de la vérité religieuse et de la sincérité scientifique.¹

His exposition of Sérapion's inaccuracies and misrepresentations regarding him are meant to demonstrate the former's failure to create a new apologetics. What Sérapion was calling his "discipline nouvelle" was simply the manipulation of "evidence" in order to illustrate his personal religious system, a system which he identifies with orthodoxy.²

Sérapion quotes Lagrange's attempt to explain Loisy's desire to remain in the Church:

Si Loisy venait à renoncer à l'Eglise, il ne lui restait rien . . . Tout son système religieux avait pour residu une grande société, et il importait qu'elle parût continuer l'Eglise dont le passé était si glorieux, dont lui avait été le ministère. Si l'Eglise lui manquait, il n'avait plus d'oeuvre à remplir, son message n'avait plus d'objet. . . .³

Loisy wonders how he could possibly identify "the great society" with the Church when all his disquiet of spirit has come from the Church and her teaching.⁴ Surely the situation has been misread. But Sérapion himself comes much closer to the truth when he explains that Loisy's real reason for wishing to remain in the Church was

gens qui regorgent d'idées n'ont pas le temps de polir leur style. Par malheur, les idées, chez les chevaliers de l'orthodoxisme, sont quelquefois pires encore que le langage." Un Mythe, pp. 122-23.

¹Ibid., p. 142.

²Ibid., pp. 53-54.

³Ibid., p. 122.

⁴Ibid., p. 123.

that he thought the salvation of the world lay in the reform of the Church and that, by remaining within her, he could be part of that reform.¹

"Une Hérésie Mal Comprise"

Although the previous chapter makes it clear that Loisy did not aim at being heretical but found himself in that situation involuntarily, he would at least like his heresy understood. This chapter hopes to clarify his beliefs rather than his position relative to the Church. His attitude toward mysticism and "le Mystère" stands out in relief as the basis of his faith while the central thrust of the chapter is toward a clarification of his beliefs concerning God and humanity.

As throughout the previous chapters, Loisy emphasizes the indefinability of God, lashing out at anthropomorphisms:

Je rapelle que le prototype palestinien de notre SÉrapion, vers la fin du IV^e siècle, estimait que Dieu a forme humaine, puisque, d'après la Genèse, il a créé l'homme à son image: et cet antique SÉrapion aurait pu de même invoquer certaines visions des prophètes ou des apocalypses; aussi bien le Dieu qui se battit avec Jacob et avec Moïse avait-il sûrement la forme d'un boxeur.²

If he returns again to creation it is because, although distinct ideas, the problems of God, creation and man are inextricably linked, creation being "le rapport mystérieux et ineffable de l'univers a son principe."³

If he has a religion of humanity it is not humanitarian

¹Ibid., p. 141.

²Ibid., pp. 148-49.

³Ibid., p. 153.

positivism¹ but a religion that refuses to allow the narrow limits of one human tradition to blind him to the values inherent in the others. His faith is not, as Sérapion misrepresents it,² in humanity, but rather faith in mysterious reality, the reality on which all else depends as on its first principle.³ And he founds moral behavior on this faith as well as on our knowledge of humanity.⁴ As opposed to the orthodox attitude which tends to direct the present with an eye to a future life, Loisy emphasizes that

. . . le point culminant, central, essentiel, de notre existence personnelle, est dans la vie présente, ou nous collaborons activement à l'oeuvre de Dieu et au salut véritable de l'humanité. Mais comme il serait faux de dire que par la naissance nous sommes venus de néant, il serait pareillement arbitraire de soutenir que nous y rentrons par le mort. Le fait est seulement que nous sommes venus du mystère et que nous y retournons.⁵

The chapter and the book end with a plea for an enlargement of vision. After dismissing the bulk of his quarrels with Sérapion as "Byzantine," Loisy would point us toward the future where, unless the religions undergo increasing spiritualization they will be unable to contribute to the salvation of mankind.⁶

One may well wonder if the issues Loisy has dealt with throughout the book are considered to be dated why he has bothered with them at all. There is, of course the very human motive of self-justification, the desire to set the record straight. But, although he saw these issues as peripheral and outmoded by comparison with what he would consider the real religious problem of our time (the increasing

¹Ibid., p. 143.

³Ibid., p. 149.

⁵Ibid., p. 182.

²Ibid., p. 173.

⁴Ibid., p. 173.

⁶Ibid., pp. 184-85.

distance between faith, as he defines it, and belief) he realized that his contemporaries still considered the "Byzantine" battles worth fighting. What he had to do in Un Mythe Apologétique was to indicate the insufficiency of orthodox apologetics by opposing it with his own position.

Loisy's style and the numerous skirmishes in which he engages often obscure larger purposes as well as the underlying philosophical tensions which produce them. For this reason the following chapter is an effort at describing the philosophical action of the book so that Loisy's apologetics, which is suggested rather than clearly set forth, will become more discernible.

CHAPTER III

THE DUEL

Beneath the series of intellectual skirmishes which make up Un Mythe lies the real action of the book: the duel between the traditional Scholastic approach to religion and the modern historical approach. Both attempt to deal with the religious crisis which Loisy describes as the result of the development of the natural and human sciences over the course of the last few centuries. These sciences have collided with Christian and Catholic tradition "moulées dans les cadres de l'ignorance primitive et de la culture antique."¹ But the crisis is not one of opposing doctrinal systems. It is rather "l'évolution humaine qui se confronte à son passée."²

If, as Loisy believes, the crisis is one of post-Enlightenment man in the era of scientific discovery facing his newly accessible past, this duel between two major approaches to it becomes more than the attempted vindication of one man's method or system. At least Loisy sees it as important to the future of man, to his salvation as man.³ For he was convinced that

C'est, en effet, dans les religions que s'est peu à peu dégagée la notion spirituelle de l'humanité, notion essentiellement religieuse, et qui en achevant de se définir, définira par la même la religion héritière de toutes les religions qui l'auront

¹Ibid., p. 94.

²Ibid.

³See *ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

préparée. Mais l'avenir des hommes est jusqu'à un certain point dans leurs mains; c'est à eux qu'il appartient, en somme, de créer la religion qui les sauvera. Ils n'y parviendront que par un grand effort, non seulement de science et d'habileté mais de foi et de moralité, disons de désintéressement et de réciproque dévouement.¹

And he was equally convinced that Catholicism needed to be liberated from the approach typified by Sérapion. Un Mythe is part of his contribution to the process of liberation.

In his account of his own theological crisis, Loisy credits his encounters with scholastic philosophy and theology as having caused it:

Lacune pour moi inexplicable: je ne vois pas que Sérapion, décrivant et analysant ma "crise" intérieure, ait fait la moindre allusion au début incontestable de cette crise, c'est-à-dire à mon premier contact avec la philosophie et la théologie scolastiques, durant les années scolaires 1875-1878 . . . mais, dès que j'abordai les traités récents de philosophie scolastique et la doctrine de Saint Thomas d'Aquin dans la Summa theologica et dans la Summa contra Gentes, je fus envahi par un irrésistible malaise, ce que j'oserai appeler la crainte et l'horreur du vide que je présentais sous ces constructions abstraites. On expliquera comme on voudra ce sentiment spontané, qu'aucune influence extérieure n'avait provoqué, que je considèrerai moi-même longtemps comme un scrupule à surmonter. C'était bien autre chose, et le malaise ne disparût que progressivement, dans les années subséquentes, lorsque je m'a donnai de plus en plus à des études rationaliste, -ce qui n'est pas vrai, -ou que j'étais atteint de débilité mentale, -ce qui n'est peut-être pas non plus tout à fait démontré.²

Oppositional Reasoning

There seems to be no reason to doubt this assertion, particularly when the most cursory glance at Loisy's career reveals a

¹Alfred Loisy, Religion et Humanité (Paris: Nourry, 1926), p. 50.

²Un Mythe, pp. 95-96.

series of clashes between his method of using data from history and experience as raw material for religious speculation and the prevailing method of erecting abstract constructions from existing dogmatic elaborations of the tradition. What seems to provoke "la crainte et l'horreur du vide" is a kind of oppositional reasoning that characterizes the theology he resists. He objects to a process of abstraction which denies the true variability of nature, narrowing the conceptual field so drastically that the real issues are obscured in favor of a contrived problem with an equally contrived solution. By numerous prejudgments on the data it reduces it to oppositional constructs: black and white; right and wrong; true and false; orthodox, heterodox; making adjustments in "grey" areas very difficult. Since the real world is apprehended through countless subtleties of hue, this system cannot function without a good deal of distortion.

A good example of this kind of reasoning occurs at the beginning of Chapter III. And, when Loisy has reduced Sérapion's construction to rubble by attacking this form of reasoning, he has badly damaged his whole work. For all of the first four fascicules of La Pensée Moderne et le Catholicisme rest on the opposition of "the two methods" which Sérapion expounds in La Pensée de M. Loisy, the first of the books to be published.

On dirait que l'esprit de Sérapion s'est formé à l'école des théologiens scolastiques. Voici ce qu'il nous enseigne (III, 52-54) touchant les deux méthodes qui existeraient pour accorder la tradition catholique avec la modernité:

"Il y a deux méthodes, et deux méthodes seules,"

-Sérapion veut dire: deux méthodes seulement.

"pour opérer l'alliance de la tradition et de l'actualité, de l'ancien et du nouveau, de la vérité et la conscience."

Construction abstraite, vu que la tradition n'est pas un tout homogène et invariable, non plus actualité.¹

Sérapion tells us that there are only two methods of reconciling Catholic tradition and modernity, but he does not tell us how he arrived at this conclusion. One must imagine that he has ignored a number of possibilities and arrived at his immense certitude on this point at some expense to truth. In addition, Loisy points out that to deal with tradition as a homogeneous and invariable entity is to create an abstraction that does not correspond to reality. The same is true of modern thought. This is not to say that one can never use the terms "tradition" and "modern thought" for Loisy uses them himself. He is objecting to their use in a watertight construction which he considers false because it ignores important data.

What are Sérapion's two methods? The first is to determine what the tradition is (Sérapion tells us immediately that it is the history of the identity of truth) and then to turn to the zeitgeist with this "measuring stick" in order to discern what is conformable to the spirit and what is not, assimilating the former and rejecting the latter. The second method is the process in reverse. One discovers what contemporary thought is, borrows its language, is nourished by its precepts and impregnated by its spirit. In this state

¹Ibid., p. 92.

he returns to tradition, rejecting all that does not conform to modern thought and adapting the rest.¹

Sérapion has set up an opposition which is acceptable within his system and which could allow the abstractions "tradition" and "modern thought" a homogeneity that neither actually possesses. Loisy cannot bring himself to think within these categories and is convinced that the only reason Sérapion is employing them is in order to set up an orthodoxy, his own or (since he does not possess the requisite authority for that) his own system.

Not only is the opposition of the terms based on a false perception of them, it is also false to oppose the development of religion with that of culture as though they did not develop together, but somehow evolved in separate compartments. In reality the two are hard to disentangle. Loisy notes that it is often through developments in culture that religion receives new interpretations of its tradition.² Finally, Loisy objects to Sérapion's opposing him with systematic views rather than with real experiences in the order of religion and of scientific research.³

"Renan et Newman": The Failure of Sérapion's Method

Sérapion's comparison of Renan and Newman, and Loisy's attack on it in his second chapter, provide an excellent example of the duel. Two methods are in conflict, but they are not the two

¹Ibid., pp. 92-93.

²Ibid., p. 93.

³Ibid.

described by Sérapion. His, systematic and general, is challenged by Loisy's, asystematic and particular. Abstract, oppositional reasoning is attacked by an approach that takes experience and history into account.

For Sérapion, Renan and Newman cease to be individuals. They become symbols of the two methods (his), the particularities of their lives only significant insofar as they further their resemblance to the methods the two men have come to represent. The establishment of a comparison between the two is meant to be the basis of Sérapion's "new" apologetic.¹

Loisy's aim, in Chapter II, is to show that Renan and Newman are unrecognizable in the portraits Sérapion has painted of them² and furthermore, it is simply absurd to compare them in the first place since their religious backgrounds, fields of expertise and interest, and scientific horizons are so different.³ As for Sérapion's hope

¹"En tant qu'il est permis de préjuger les mérites de la nouvelle science que Sérapion se propose d'instaurer sur le parallèle établi par lui entre Renan et Newman, on peut craindre que cette science précieuse ne soit fondée sur une base un peu étroite. Une chose du moins paraît tout à fait certaine: c'est que la Critique religieuse, la science nouvelle fondée par Sérapion, ne représentera pas une expérience humaine et religieuse limitée, comme celles qu'ont faites respectivement Renan et Newman, mais en tout et pour tout, le système apologétique de Sérapion." Ibid., p. 61.

²"Le présent chapitre est pour montrer que je ne me reconnais ni dans l'un ni dans l'autre, et que même je ne les reconnais pas très bien ni l'un ni l'autre dans les portraits qui nous sont donnés par Sérapion de leurs personnalités religieuses." Ibid., p. 47.

³Loisy explains that beyond the other differences between them lies that of their fields of interest and the nature of their approaches. Had they both been exegetes, or religious philosophers, or alike in their belief or unbelief one might more readily see

that Loisy would find himself "plus en Newman qu'en Renan," we are assured that he is to be found in neither. This is a statement for which S erapion's system is not prepared since, not only do Renan and Newman symbolize his two methods (a fact which is only clear after reading the third fascicule) but they also correspond to the two divisions S erapion has made of all humanity.¹ Therefore Loisy must be found in one or the other.

The oppositional reasoning underlying this construction is further extended when S erapion reduces the possible formulations of the problem of God, the religious question bedeviling modern (thinking) man, to two: "Dieu  tait-il une conscience transcendante   l'histoire humaine, ou Dieu  tait-il la pens e m me?"² S erapion also sees his chosen personalities as perfect symbols of the responses implicit in these formulations intending to show by successive arguments that one is right and one wrong. In the process he will kill two birds with one stone since Loisy will be felled along with Renan

grounds for comparison. But one accepted the Biblical foundations of Christianity unquestioningly, merely seeking the ecclesiastical structure most conformable to them while the other busied himself with inquiries which indicated that the Biblical foundations were not what they had seemed. One was a profoundly religious man while the other had lost any semblance of faith.

¹"S erapion abuse vraiment de la facult  que chacun de nous a de tout dire, m me invraisemblable et l'absurde, pour nous repartir en deux cat gories, ceux qui, domin s par une philosophie n gative, comme l'aurait  t , selon lui, Renan, et comme il suppose que je suis moi-m me, m connaissent la valeur absolue du christianisme catholique, et ceux qui, appuy s, comme Newman, sur leur foi chr tienne et catholique, construisent une philosophie de l'univers vraiment exacte parce que religieuse." Ibid., p. 60.

²Ibid., p. 52.

and the entire modernist movement silenced forever. (At least this is his hope.) But Loisy simply won't cooperate and recognize himself in Sérapion's portrait of Renan and even grant the Newman-Renan comparison any validity.

Ni Renan ni Newman sont des types généraux; c'étaient des hommes, et point petits, de grands esprits, même de grands génies, aussi peu faits que possible pour représenter un genre. Il n'est pas vrai que "la doute métaphysique" ait induit Renan à "sa critique négative": la critique de Renan n'était pas de tout négative; elle aurait été plutôt, en maint endroit, trop réservée et circonspecte; mais sur ce point nous reviendrons. Et de même on peut douter que la philosophie religieuse suggérée par l'expérience actuelle qu'il avait de l'Eglise. Il est vrai seulement que l'expérience scientifique de Renan était plus grande que celle de Newman, et l'expérience religieuse de Newman plus grande que celle de Renan.¹

Another illustration of the inadequacies of Sérapion's method is Loisy's response to the assertion that there are two possible solutions to the problem of God. Loisy offers five without assuming that all the possibilities have been enumerated:

Voilà, certes, une conception bien étroite, et du mystère de l'univers, et du mystère de l'homme, et du mystère de la religion, du mystère de Dieu. D'abord, s'il n'agit que du problème posé, plus de deux solutions semblent possibles: indépendamment de la solution agréée par Sérapion, laquelle, prise dans sa lettre, est celle de la métaphysique chrétienne, adaptée à la métaphysique propre de Sérapion lui-même, il y aurait la solution idéaliste, que Sérapion juge ruineuse (Hegel, Renan et Cie); et de plus la solution matérialiste, fermée à toute métaphysique; la solution agnostique, qui est proprement celle du positivisme; le solution de nos grands philosophes rationalistes (Voltaire, Rousseau, etc.); enfin la solution que j'appellerai mystique, laquelle professe que Dieu est le mystère éternel, au-dessus de toute définition, et qu'on le rabaisse en le déclarent semblable à l'homme.²

The last solution, the mystical, is of course, Loisy's and we will have more to say about it later on.

Loisy is saying, through his criticism of the Renan-Newman

¹Ibid., p. 61.

²Ibid., p. 56.

parallel as well as of the two methods and the two solutions to the problem of God, that Sérapion, and those he represents, erect their systems on foundations which are too narrow conceptually and, because of this narrowness, are so removed from the richness and variability of actuality and experience as to be irrelevant. He is also saying that reality is inadequately expressed in the processions of pairs, the series of oppositions, to which Sérapion seems to reduce it.

Exegesis and Philosophy in the
Thought of Renan and Loisy

The second section of Chapter II, the defense of Renan, is as important for Loisy as it is for Renan since Loisy is well aware that he is included by Sérapion in Renan's camp and stands accused of many of the same "sins." One of them, perhaps the most important in the eyes of their adversaries, is that of erecting their religious theories upon philosophical foundations of doubtful solidity. We have just taken a brief look at Sérapion's foundations and found them wanting in breadth. Loisy's and Renan's claim to be "wanting" in philosophy for both Renan and Loisy insist that their questions and subsequent conclusions rest, not on any systematic philosophy, but on the findings of exegetical research. Even Sérapion admits that this is how Renan views the genesis of his own religious questioning. But Renan's witness on his own behalf does not seem as valid to Sérapion as his own opinion on the matter.¹

Loisy directs us to Renan's Souvenirs for further enlighten-

¹Ibid., see pp. 62-63.

ment on the subject, adding that he, Loisy, knew the man, watched him work, heard him lecture, and studied under him for three years. In all that time he never heard Renan emit a single word of abstract philosophy. Instead he occupied himself entirely with painstaking textual criticism. The results of the criticism of those years was later published in Histoire du peuple d'Israël, Volume I, in which nothing of the philosophy of becoming (the one for which he stands condemned by Sérapion) intervened. Loisy adds that, of course, as a young seminarian at Issy Renan had some interest in philosophy, but he had not developed one of his own at that point and later, when he had, it was never a systematic one.¹

Sérapion's own opinion of the matter, unsupported (rather, contradicted) by the evidence is that

"l'exegèse, les contradictions des sources" bibliques "ou les erreurs positives auxquelles était lié l'enseignement officiel et obligatoire de l'Eglise" n'auraient jamais détourné Renan de l'orthodoxie, s'il n'avait nourri une philosophie erronée.²

It appears that Sérapion's own philosophical system, which refuses to admit evidence that seems to contradict the Church's official teaching on religious matters, blinds him to the possibility that others may operate differently. It is inconceivable to him that they do not always submit their experience to their prejudices but, on the contrary, might allow experience to upset or challenge those prejudices. It is also inconceivable to him that others, while not free of philosophical presuppositions, are free of the sort of system that constrains him.

¹Ibid., pp. 49-50.

²Ibid., p. 63.

To further argue his case, Loisy presents his own experience as evidence that exegesis could lead to serious problems with the official teachings of Catholicism:

Je connais, moi, quelqu'un qui a été troublé dans sa foi par l'exégèse, l'état et le caractère des sources bibliques, les erreurs palpables contenues dans l'enseignement officiel du catholicisme, et cela sans moindre préoccupation d'une philosophie quelconque. -Il est vrai que Sérapion traitera mon cas tout comme cela de Renan, en glanant de-ci de-là, dans mes textes, les lignes où il dénichera la philosophie qui m'a perdu, si nous l'en croyons; mais je l'avertis dès ici qu'il usé d'un précède sophistique et qu'il fait fausse route, tant pour Renan que pour moi.¹

One need be neither an exegete nor a philosopher to find fault with Sérapion's approach. On exegetical questions he shows himself totally lacking in the necessary erudition for any valid criticism of Renan's views. When one tries to discover the ground from which his criticism proceeds it seems to be nothing more than the vague discomfort he experiences on encountering views that oppose his own, more out of a sense that they are unsettling to his present position than from a genuinely intellectual dissatisfaction. Perhaps we have here an instance of the Heffalump tumbling into his own trap. For it is he, not Renan or Loisy, who is coming to distorted theological conclusions as a result of his philosophical system.

After reviewing the material, all one can say with reference to the positive researches of Renan and Loisy and their philosophical presuppositions is that these presuppositions did not prevent them from asking unorthodox questions or pursuing unorthodox

¹Ibid.

solutions to the questions raised. As for Sérapion's presuppositions, they did prevent him from asking such questions or pursuing such solutions.

Loisy's Apologetics

What bearing, if any, has the preceding on Loisy's apologetics? His strategy has been to make Sérapion appear as foolish as possible, hoping that his method would be similarly discredited. Since that method, at least as displayed by Loisy, rests on a near total ignorance of modern exegesis and an a-historical, fundamentalist acceptance of dogma as contemporaneously stated, I think it reasonable to assume that Loisy wishes to situate his apologia on a solid historical base which allows the questions raised by exegesis and historical studies to affect our understanding of dogma. But our understanding of exegesis will have to undergo something of a transformation if it is to correspond to Loisy's at the end of his life. The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures, the study of which occupied the greater part of his adult life, are only part of the larger tradition, the human tradition, which also requires "exegesis" if a man is to salvage his future. At the end of Un Mythe, Loisy places the "biblical question" in perspective:

La question biblique, Sérapion, elle était déjà vieille au temps de Léon XIII et de l'Encyclique Providentissimus Deus: relisez et méditez les propos de sagesse que me tenait alors le défunt Cardinal Meignan. Quels pas cette même question n'a-t-elle pas faits depuis! Pour garantir l'authenticité, l'historicité, la véracité des deux Testaments, vous vous agitez inutilement. Ce n'est plus cela qui importe aujourd'hui.

Il faudrait d'urgence sauver la raison indispensable, aussi

bien que la foi nécessaire. Les querelles byzantines sur des problèmes inexistants ou périmés n'y peuvent plus rien. C'est à l'humanité même, à ce qui constitue vraiment l'humanité, qu'il faudrait assurer un avenir. Que Dieu la protège contre tous les sophismes, d'où qu'ils viennent, et qu'il la conduise par le moins possible de misères et de catastrophes à son destin providentiel!

Une seule chose est à réaliser maintenant, qui fut toujours de nécessité première: le salut des hommes. Et donc, plus que jamais,

Il faut battre le rappel de l'humanité.¹

Does this imply a belittlement of the Sacred Scriptures?

No. Half a century of intensely studying them would seem to be proof enough that he considered them worthy recipients of his time, talents and life-energy. Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne describes his attitude to them:

Il ne faut jamais perdre de vue que l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testaments sont présentés par Loisy comme le constat le plus impressionnant de l'irruption dans l'histoire d'une force spirituelle (et révolutionnaire).²

Il ne s'interrogeait pas sur son salut et cette extinction de la foi théologique en lui n'entamait pas son attachement à l'Eglise. Et, en effet, il gardait, et a gardé toute sa vie, le sentiment de la présence du divin dans les Livres Saints. Dès ce moment il a cherché à sauver ce qu'il y a authentiquement religieux dans ces textes en le distinguant des présentations et des interprétations historiques et contingentes qui en ont été faites au cours de notre histoire culturelle. Et il croyait que l'Eglise avait la possibilité et la vocation de ce renouvellement.³

However, if the Scriptures are the most impressive witness to the invasion of history by the spiritual or the divine, Loisy situates them in history, particularly religious history, all of which may be seen as a witness to the divine.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 185.

²Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, pp. 64-65.

³Ibid., p. 37.

⁴Un Mythe, p. 52.

Further light may be shed on Loisy's apologetics by comparing it with Sérapion's.

Two Apologists

In a consideration of the apologetics of Loisy and Sérapion it should be noted that they are, in the first place, defending different phenomena. For Sérapion, the definitive proof of a transcendent God is the Church:

En revanche, s'il est établi que l'Eglise, depuis sa fondation jusqu'à nos jours, a conservé sa même forme et sa même foi, qu'elle satisfait aux divers besoins de l'humanité, qu'elle a enrichi la formule de sa foi, qu'elle est en accord avec les tendances légitimes du monde moderne, que seule elle peut les empêcher de se corrompre et de se détruire par leurs excès, si le fait de cette action continue est révélé, alors et du même coup on peut répondre qu'une assistance plus qu'humaine la soutient.

Dès lors pourquoi n'y aurait-il pas au-dessus de l'humanité un Etre infini qui l'aurait créée pour associer à sa gloire, après un temps plus ou long d'épreuve?¹

Loisy's dissatisfaction with this reasoning is expressed in particulars throughout the first chapter, but his most profound objection reveals the essential difference between his apologetic and that of his opponent. Sérapion completely identifies the problem of God with the Church. It is as though the only means we have of experiencing the divine is the Church and therefore, it is enough to defend it in order to verify God's existence. And this can be done with perfect clarity through abstractions which need have no reference to experience.

Loisy does not identify the two, less out of a great dis-

¹Ibid.

affection for the Church than from his inability to reduce the mystery we have called God to the dimensions of any of our human constructions whether ecclesiological or rational. The lines of battle are clear: Sérapion is the defender of the Church and Loisy is the defender of the Mystery.

Not surprisingly, the foundations of the two apologies differ as well. Sérapion founds his on three propositions:

Dieu existe
Le miracle est possible
L'âme est immortelle.¹

The second of the propositions is combined with the first in a syllogism which "proves" that Christ is God:

Dieu existe (A).
Or, Jésus-Christ a fait des miracles que Dieu seul peut faire (B).
Donc, Jésus-Christ est Dieu (C).²

Sérapion's first proposition, "Dieu existe" is challenged only in a secondary sense by Loisy. What he questions is the complete identification of God with the historical ideas and symbols man has used in reference to him; the philosophical complacency which assumes that the word "God" conveys a universally recognizable reality.

Est-ce que vous croyez, vous, Sérapion, vous historien, vous philosophe, que toute cette mythologie, toutes ces mythologies bibliques sont absolument et éternellement vraies, et qu'elles ne sont pas, dans leurs formes, les rêves d'une humanité encore peu avancée dans la vie de l'Esprit, des symboles très imparfaits du Dieu vivant et vrai?³

Loisy's criticism of this proposition is, in fact, a defense of God, the Mystery in whose presence he is careful to remove his intellectual

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Ibid., pp. 39-40.

³Ibid., p. 35.

shoes, recognizing that this is holy ground. The defense of this Mystery requires him to smash the idols, the anthropomorphisms, particularly the version of the deity rendered by Sérapion which he suggests is merely the artisan writ large.¹ One might compare his criticism to the via negativa of the mystic.

D'un point de vue purement rationnel, au lieu de dire: "Dieu existe," ne devrait-on pas dire: "Le mystère existe, nous accablant de son infinité? Mais, pratiquement, non seulement pour la détermination de notre pensée, aussi pour le règlement de notre conduite morale, force nous est de construire une figuration, étant "la catégorie de l'idéal," comme disait notre vieux Renan. Notons toutefois que cette image a toujours été, depuis qu'elle existe, indéfiniment mobile et qu'elle reste perfectible. C'est que les mythes de toutes les religions depuis qu'il y en a, et non seulement le mythe juif, qui est devenu le mythe, chrétien de Dieu, sont des figurations de la Divinité. Or, dans cet ordre de l'idéal religieux et moral, si le fond, l'élan vers le Divin, semble indéstructible, la forme est sûrement mouvante et perfectible indéfiniment. La majeure de Sérapion n'a pas la solidité absolue qu'il y prétend trouver, Car, Dieu, c'est le mystère."²

"Le miracle est possible." In a sense, Loisy's handling of this statement reflects his entire approach to religion. He sees the emphasis on the miraculous as symbolic of the human tendency toward the magical and the anthropomorphic and away from the Mystery. A major theme in his entire oeuvre is the attempt to wean humanity away from the magical in order to direct it toward the mysterious which is the mode of God's action in the world.³

¹Ibid., p. 40.

²Ibid. p. 42.

³"Le vrai, maintenant, c'est que Dieu est essentiellement mystère, que son action normale n'est pas miraculeuse, qu'elle est mystérieuse; le rapport de l'humanité à Dieu appartient au mystère; et de même, à meilleur titre que pour le commun des hommes, le rapport du Christ à Dieu. Ibid., p. 45.

The question, as he puts it, is whether there are or can be miracles which are characteristic of God and whether the magic miracle is compatible with the Divine and its activity.¹ He cannot imagine a world ruled by a perfectly wise and powerful God needing the intervention of that God for his will to be accomplished.² His final conclusion regarding miracles: "Le miracle, Sérapion, remonte aux temps de l'animisme, où rien n'arrivait que par l'intervention des esprits en passe de devenir dieux"³ does not concede any validity to Sérapion's proposition and demolished his Christological syllogism. For, by deciding that the miraculous is not God's proper mode of action and that there are no miracles proper to God alone, he detaches the conclusion regarding Christ's divinity from its supports. He also points out the difficulty with the simple equation of Christ with God. This is not a matter of denying Christ's divinity but rather the acknowledgment of God's transcendence and our continuing bewilderment when faced with the mystery of Jesus Christ. The syllogism is what Loisy denies.

As for the third proposition, Loisy wonders what Sérapion means by the soul and by immortality. He simply raises philosophical questions which do not seem to him to have been given

¹Ibid., see pp. 42-43.

²"Si l'ordre de la nature, -j'entends celui de la naturelle et des mondes infinis, -est réglé par un Dieu parfaitement sage et tout puissant, il me semble purement inconcevable que son oeuvre ait été si mal organisée qu'il dût intervenir à chaque instant de sa personne, si l'on peut dire, pour assurer l'accomplissement de sa volonté." Ibid., p. 43.

³Ibid., p. 38.

answers satisfactory enough for the proposition to rest securely on a rational base.¹

Sérapion's God, anthropomorphic and apparently totally absorbed in the vicissitudes of our "chétive planète"² belongs to a geocentric, pre-Copernican cosmos where the limitations and comprehensibility of the cosmology can more understandably admit the kind of abstract systematization which characterizes his apologetics. Loisy suggests that the Mystery is too great for the confines of either the outgrown cosmology or the categories of Aristotelian logic.

The two apologists, then, are distinguished by their objectives: Sérapion's is to defend the faith, the Church, the status quo; Loisy's is to defend the Mystery (often against the faith, the Church and the status quo). Their methods too are different. Sérapion proceeds from his three fundamental propositions to establish a rational base for orthodox Catholicism. Loisy uses a negative approach, moving from the existence of the Mystery as recorded in the cumulative experience of mankind as well as his own to demolish what seems to contradict that experience. There is even a tonic dissonance: Sérapion's is certain, authoritarian, absolute; Loisy's, searching, certain only of what the Mystery is not and, thus, of what he

¹Ibid., see pp. 38-39.

²Ibid., p. 57.

must destroy in order to prevent further confusing of It with golden calves.

CHAPTER IV

MYSTICAL APOLOGETICS

So far, the analysis of Un Mythe Apologétique has taken the form of an inward journey. First we presented the exterior form of the work, following that with a chapter on the philosophical-theological duel being waged beneath the structure. In this chapter we will go one step further (or deeper) in an attempt to establish the source of Loisy's apologetics as well as to examine his use of the terms "God," "religion," "faith."

It has been pointed out that Loisy's apologetics differed from the mainline orthodox variety (as represented by Sérapion) in its object: the defense of God rather than of the established church; its method: the "via negativa approach" which attacks orthodox apologetics; and its foundation: in mystic experience rather than on abstract propositions. Throughout Un Mythe there is a constant and unmistakable emphasis on "le Mystère" and the mysterious nature of God's activity in history which is counterpoised to Sérapion's emphasis on God's miraculous interventions and their specificity.

. . . il y a le mystère, il y a surtout le mystère, et le mystère est une réalité, plus vivante que tous nos essais de représentation conceptuelle. Sérapion, inconsciemment, se nourrit de mythes, n'ayant pas, à ce qu'il semble, le réel sentiment du profond mystère que sont nécessairement pour nous Dieu, l'homme et le monde; c'est de ses mythes qu'il prétend nous convaincre et, s'il n'y réussit pas, il nous anathématisera charitablement. S'il

voulait bien mettre le mystère à la place du miracle, on pourrait s'entendre.¹

Clearly Loisy is compelled to defend the incomprehensible reality from imprisonment in our conceptualizations of it. And his method is a negative one, iconoclastic and merciless. If Yaweh has been called a "jealous" god, Loisy is a "jealous" defender of God, ever alert to destroy the images of divinity when they threaten to supplant the reality.

The Mystic

I have suggested that the source of Loisy's apologetics is his own experience, an experience which led him to challenge the prevailing variety. This experience included some profound awareness of "the Mystery" as well as his reaction to what the study of history had disclosed to him of mankind's common religious consciousness. His own words confirm this as does the dedication of his life, the energy of his conviction and the testimony of his friends.

Scholars have categorized the two main traditions in the history of mystical experience as "apophatic" and "cataphatic," the former referring to the way of darkness and unknowing (Pseudo-Dionysius) and the latter, to the way of light and knowledge (Augustine). Rather than being descriptions of two different experiences, apophatic and cataphatic describe two sides of the same coin: mystical experience. For, if one examines the writings of the great mystics and tries to penetrate their meaning, one discovers that the "light" is a blinding one and the "knowing" conveys no more to the mind than does the "unknowing." But

¹Un Mythe, p. 39.

since the apophatic tradition emphasizes the unknowableness of God and the negation of all that he is not, it may be a useful category in our attempt to come to grips with Loisy's negative mystical apologetics.

John Saward says of the apophatic experience:

The way to true life means not clinging onto anything as we know it--God, our world, ourselves--it means exposing oneself to darkness. The apophatic tradition is crystallized by Gregory's (of Nyssa) doctrines of the divine darkness and the importance of change. To refuse to settle for the available definitions of God and of man is more than a convenient philosophical position. It is to participate in the mystery of death and resurrection; it means being dispossessed in faith.¹

One need not belabor the coincidence between this description of apophatic experience and Loisy's apologetics: "not clinging to anything as we know it"; "the divine darkness and the importance of change"; "To refuse to settle for the available definitions of God and man" . . . What we see in Un Mythe Apologétique is a mystic apologetics, apophatic in tone and mode, urged on by an impatience with the gap between what Loisy saw as possible articulations of "le Mystère" and its relation to history and what had actually been articulated. Its negativity owes as much to mystical experience as it does to the exigencies of the times and the state of the art and if any new articulation were to be attempted in the future, it would first have to be demonstrated that the old was insufficient being several sizes too small for the expanding consciousness of modern man. This was the task Loisy set for himself.

If Loisy's is indeed a mystic, an apophatic, apologetics, then

¹John Saward, "Towards an Apophatic Anthropology," Irish Theological Quarterly, July, 1974, p. 232.

it would follow that his self-consciousness would include a perception of himself as mystic and that the mystical would obtrude fairly frequently in Un Mythe.

As has been mentioned earlier, "le Mystere" and mystery as the mode of the divine permeate Un Mythe. But in his fourth chapter "Une hérésie mal comprise" where Loisy hopes to deliver his most telling blows against his opponent, the mystic in him really comes to the fore. Sérapion's characterization of the "final stage" of his thought as being humanitarian positivism is the "misunderstanding" which Loisy must combat. He does so in part by accusing Sération of omitting the two editions of La Religion from the latter's list of Loisy's works on philosophy of religion. He is particularly miffed at the omission of the preface to the second edition (1924) which exposes much of his thought on mysticism and religion, a sample of which follows:

Le mysticisme est l'âme de toutes les religions, et il est, à travers les religions qui passent, la grande poussée de l'esprit dans la religion qui ne meurt pas.

. . . l'art humain traduit la vie de l'esprit, il élève les formes sensibles à l'ordre spirituel; il célèbre et fait briller l'esprit, comme la religion l'adore et comme la morale en vit.

La nature de l'homme est plus profonde que sa faculté de critique rationnelle, et c'est du fond de la nature humaine que procèdent, avant tout rudiment de science méthodique, non seulement la faculté, le besoin et le désir de connaître, mais avec et dans cette faculté même, ce besoin et ce désir, le sens mystique le sens de l'esprit, fondement de connaissance, source de la religion, de la morale et de l'art, racine de l'humanité.¹

"Root of humanity" . . . If mysticism is our means of contacting the divine, then humanity (in so far as it is rooted and human) is

¹Un Mythe, p. 147.

rooted in the divine and it is the divine nourishment it receives from its roots that is the source of its humanity. This does not sound like humanitarian positivism, or atheism, or agnosticism. It is a profoundly mystical view of man. Human art is the celebration of spirit, its translation into sensible forms, and the elevation of those forms to the order of spirit. Religion is the adoration of spirit; morality is the living of it. Because Alfred Loisy says these things they are no less worthy of our attention or our admiration than if they were said by Saint Bonaventure. But historical prejudice has so colored our responses that many of us would find a way to discredit Loisy's mysticism as those have who discredited his simple country life:

On voit l'intensité de cette production scientifique, rendue possible par l'inflexible régularité de labeur de M. Loisy et la vie retirée qu'il mena dans son ermitage de Garnay et aujourd'hui à Ceffonds. Chose étrange! des ecclésiastiques qui se montrent plus d'admiration, et avec raison, devant saint Bonaventure surpris un jour dans la cuisine de son couvent où il lavait la vaisselle ont trouvé ridicule de voir M. Loisy prenant soin de son poulailler avec plus d'intelligence et de succès que les fermières ses voisines. Pourquoi deux actes si analogues seraient-ils inégalement édifiante?¹

A good question. This quotation brings up another point for our consideration. The kind of life that Alfred Loisy led after as well as before his excommunication bears on the issue under discussion, namely his mysticism. Not even his enemies have been able to convict him of any irregularities of conduct. He led his life simply and with a dedication to his work that, under the circumstances, qualifies as heroic virtue. For he energetically pursued truth and tried to dis-

¹Paul Sabatier, Les Modernistes (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1909), p. xxi.

seminate it without the benefit of any discernible human support. The Church had turned its back on him and with it, many of the intellectuals who had been Loisy's colleagues. As an ex-priest in a small French village, he cannot have been part of a warm human circle there. He never married or had a family of his own and most of the publicity he received, particularly after the controversy over L'Evangile et l'Eglise was negative. Where then did he get his incredible energy? Not from a robust constitution. Where then? How did he retain such a loving and positive outlook on the human community that his last book ends with a vehement plea for humanity to wake up and save itself?¹ I think the answer lies in the faithful cultivation of his roots and the extent to which he was able to assimilate the divine in his life experience.

If Loisy truly believes that mysticism is the root of humanity, then it should follow that he would consider the great mystics the crown of humanity. In fact he does seem to give them a prominence in history not often accorded to them and a sympathy as of a kindred spirit. When criticizing S erapion's version of Church history from the Reformation, he credits the "hauts mystiques" with initiating the internal movement for reform:

Il y eut alors, dans l'eglise romaine, un grand mouvement de v ritable r forme, mais l'initiative ne vint pas de la papaut , elle vint surtout de hauts mystiques. Nous en reparlerons, bien que S erapion ne dise   peu pr s rien du renouveau mystique dans le catholicisme depuis la fin du XVI^e si cle, ne l'ayant pas  tud ,   ce qu'il semble, ou ne l'ayant pas suffisamment compris, ce qui revient au m me pour le r sultat.²

¹ Un Mythe, p. 185.

² Ibid., p. 55.

The following passage could only proceed from one whose experience created the necessary understanding for such a sympathetic utterance:

Les mystiques ne sont pas des fous, comme quel-qu'uns ont affecté de le penser. Ce ne sont pas non plus des sots, car ils estiment que le mystère divin est au-dessus de toute définition: d'où il suit que les énoncés de la Bible ne sont pas des expressions adéquates, mais des figurations de la vérité; et il en va de même pour les définitions dogmatiques de l'Eglise. Ainsi les mystiques ne sont pas des fanatiques de l'orthodoxisme.¹

But if Loisy was in fact, not an atheist, not an agnostic, but a mystic, this should have been perceived by those who knew him well. So it is hardly surprising to find testimony to this effect in the writings of Henri Bremond and Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne. Henri Bremond wrote Un clerc qui n'a pas trahi under the pseudonym of Sylvain Leblanc in order to defend Loisy against his detractors. In that book he makes an important distinction between two kinds of faith: dogmatic and mystical: claiming that although he certainly lost his dogmatic faith, Loisy, nevertheless, retained a strong mystical faith.² In fact, Bremond's entire defense rests solidly on his perception of Loisy as a mystic. Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, in reflecting on Loisy's life as a whole, has this to say:

Plus je pense à Loisy, plus je crois que ce sens religieux, ce goût du spirituel est ce qui a dominé sa personne et sa vie, plus je crois que, s'il a voulu rester si longtemps dans l'Eglise, c'est parce qu'il voyait en elle la meilleure approximation de la réalité religieuse.³

¹ Ibid., p. 56.

² Sylvain Leblanc (Henri Bremond), Un Clerc n'a pas trahi: Alfred Loisy d'après ses mémoires, critical edition by Emil Poulat (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1972) from the 1931 edition, pp. 146-49.

³ Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, Entre la Foi, p. 38.

Le récit de sa vie sera le récit d'un drame au cours duquel le mystique croyant inébranlement en la valeur de la réalité religieuse s'est heurté à l'intellectuel très critique. Ce récit nous montrera aussi comment il a cru résoudre son problème en donnant aux "choses" la priorité sur les "mots."¹

He also quotes from Loisy's obituary in le Temps, June 8, 1940:

C'était une âme haute et pûre qui, malgré l'extrême radicalisme de sa critique se considéra toujours comme liée à la tradition chrétienne et ne se sentit jamais affranchie des obligations qu'elle avait contractées en recevant le caractère sacerdotal. Ceux qui l'ont connu de près garderont de lui une image bien différente de celle que peuvent suggérer les événements extérieurs et les vicissitudes de son existence tourmentée.²

Once it is understood that Loisy's approach is a mystical one, not only is his apologetics illuminated thereby, but his philosophical attitude as well. The "duel" becomes a natural consequence of his mysticism since there can be no sympathy for the tidiness of thought characteristic of Aristotelian categories or the semi-absolute certitude exuded by neo-Thomistic thought on the part of one inundated by the unknowableness of the one who eludes categories by definition.

Just as the mystic's being is absorbed by and concentrated on God, the Mystery, so the mystic apologetics of Loisy is always centered on "le Mystère" with comparatively little emphasis on specific beliefs or the defense of one religion against another. And just as Loisy carefully distinguishes between "le Mystère" and our conceptualizations of it, he is always conscious of the difference between "la religion" and "les religions"; "la foi" and "les croyances." The noble enterprise on which he is embarked is to defend the "insaisissable" reality from being confused with our graven image of it. This is not from any

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Ibid., p. 153.

lack of respect for those images or the attempts they represent. It is rather a reaction to the human tendency to worship the image instead of the reality. And that reaction is the gift he has given mankind through his life and work. Let us turn to some of the fundamental terms of his apologetics: God, religion, faith: in order to better distinguish his approach from mainline orthodoxy.

God

In the first place Loisy conceives the fundamental problem, not as one of the existence of God,¹ but as one of the continuing struggle to represent the mystery and to express the relationship of the universe to it.

Qu'il existe un principe premier de toutes choses, dont tout dépende et qui soit, en quelque façon, tout dans tout, je le conçois sans peine, et même je ne aurais concevoir l'univers sans ce principe ou en dehors de lui. Jamais je n'ai pu me représenter l'univers comme une énorme combinaison chimique subsistant par elle-même éternellement. Je me suis toujours senti dépassé par le problème de l'univers qui est aussi bien le problème de Dieu; mais le matérialisme absolu me semble être une absurdité plutôt qu'une solution. La grande difficulté agit en la manière de se représenter le premier principe et le rapport de l'univers à ce principe absolu.²

And the ongoing solution to this problem revolves around the idea of

¹For Loisy, mysticism implies the existence of "le Mystère"; man's existence, rooted as it is in mysticism, implies the existence of God. "Le mysticisme implique l'existence d'un esprit, force créatrice, dans les choses visibles, et que cet esprit est vénérable; il implique la volonté d'un esprit, d'une autorité souveraine juste et bonne, dans la vie, et que cette volonté est obligatoire; il implique l'attrait d'un esprit, merveille de beauté, dans la nature et dans ses opérations, et qu'il y a lieu pour l'homme d'incarner ce charme et de le réaliser dans ses propres oeuvres . . .", Un Mythe, pp. 146-47.

²Ibid., pp. 149-50.

creation which he defines as "la relation éternelle de l'univers a son Auteur éternel, et cette relation-là est maintenant pour nous plus intelligible que celle des trois personnes de la Trinité."¹ Not for him the idea of a creation limited in time and space. "Si Dieu est créateur, il ne peut l'être qu'éternellement, comme l'avait fort bien compris Origène."²

He prefers to use "le Mystère" because ". . . le mot Dieu est équivoque en son application" and because he opposes God's mysterious mode of acting to the conventional emphasis on miracle. How God acts, how the progressive religious and moral education of men is accomplished is a mystery to Loisy who is convinced that those who claim to have unravelled it are misled for

Au fond, il n'est pas facile de dire, en toute assurance, comment Dieu a pourvu à l'éducation religieuse et morale des hommes. Ceux qui disent le savoir semblent n'arriver à leurs fins que par un dressage préliminaire qui leur fait impliquer dans le fondement de leur argumentation la notion de Dieu où ils veulent s'arrêter.³

True to the apophaticism engendered by his experience, the only genuine affirmation Loisy makes of God is that he is the Mystery. For the rest, his effort is to show what God is not.

Je ne scrute pas le mystère de Dieu. Je ne nie pas Dieu. Le mot Dieu a signifié tant de choses que, de sens multiple il n'est pas possible que rien ne demeure. J'estime que Dieu, au sens philosophique du mot, c'est-à-dire le premier principe de l'univers est inconçevable, et il me paraît que Dieu au sens historique du mot, le Dieu chrétien, père et providence, sauveur et rémunérateur s'est évanoui avec la conception du monde et de l'histoire dont il était la suprême expression.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 57.

²Ibid., p. 111.

³Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁴Raymond de Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, Entre la Foi, p. 147. (From a letter written to him by Loisy on February 27, 1918.)

Religion

Loisy has said that religion is the adoration of spirit, but that was less a comprehensive definition than a way of distinguishing art, religion, and morality by comparing their relationship to the idea of spirit. For

Plus donc on approfondit l'histoire des religions, moins il apparait facile de définir la religion: comment trouver une formule qui convienne aux cultes primitifs et en même temps à des religions aussi disparates que le bouddhisme et le christianisme? Définissions, si cela nous plait, la religion: l'attitude morale, les formes et les pratiques de vie censée supérieure, moyennant lesquelles les hommes essaient de s'adapter aux conditions spirituelles de leur destin. Mais si la religion est malaisée à définir, la valeur des religions est tout aussi malaisée à déterminer.¹

Like the reality of God, religion is inaccessible to the intellect. All the mind can do is to study its expressions in the religions of mankind. This study is particularly important as the religions are in danger of perishing and it is necessary to salvage what they have to offer for the future of humanity, since Loisy is convinced that there will be no human future unless it is solidly based on the enduring contributions of religion.²

Because he was not, nor ever claimed to be, a philosopher, he leaves us to try to construct what his philosophy was. His anthropology is a vision of man as rational and mystical (after Durkheim) with the mystical assuming greater importance since humanity is rooted in it. Apparently the function of the rational is descriptive.³ At

¹Loisy, Religion et Humanité, p. 241.

²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

³There seems to be an analogy between the function of reason

least this seems to be Loisy's unarticulated conviction since he considers religious concepts as "figurations'" as relative attempts at imaging the divine. The reality is only approached through mysticism which he equates with Bergson's "intuition."

Dans la religion ce n'est pas le courant intellectualiste qui retiendra le plus son attention, c'est le courant mystique. Ce ne sont pas les mots qu'il interrogera, ce sont les choses comme il l'a dit lui-même. Ce n'est pas le surajouté, c'est le donné, c'est le spontané qu'il observera de préférence. Comme Edouard le Roy, comme Henri Bremond, et avec son habituelle vigueur, il a situé la source de la religion dans la pensée intuitive, qui est sans concept, antérieure au culte, antérieure a fortiori à la spéculation théologique. Cette distinction entre le notionnel (statique) et l'expérimental (dynamique) a été une des constants de la pensée de Loisy. A ses yeux le mysticisme "est la base et le principe de la vie spirituelle" et il est "essentiellement autre chose que la métaphysique."¹

The relation of the ritual to the mystical in man is analagous to that of religion to the religions or of faith to beliefs. The first terms of the comparisons refer to reality and the second to descriptions of it. So religion partakes of the essential, the real, and religions, of temporality. It is easy to see here where M. Loisy parts company with his orthodox colleagues for Christianity, and Roman Catholicism in particular, considers itself the final revelation, the final achievement of man's religious evolution.

A ses yeux, l'histoire religieuse n'est qu'accessoirement une histoire de mutations culturelles. Elle est d'abord l'histoire d'une métamorphose de l'homme en voie d'une perpétuelle spiritualisation.²

and that of history in Loisy's thought. See Alfred Loisy, Autour d'un petit livre, 2d ed. (Paris: Picard, 1903), pp. 9-10, and p. 191.

¹Boyer de Sainte Suzanne, Entre la Foi, pp. 61-62. See also p. 119.

²Ibid., p. 137.

Faith

Loisy's inadequacies as a philosopher become more obvious as we examine his ideas on faith. It becomes well nigh impossible to distinguish faith and mysticism as he describes them, but there is a distinction. Mysticism is the more general and rudimentary form of the intuition of the divine. It is the basis of the truly human, our connecting link with the spirit. Faith is the manifestation of mystic activity expressing itself in beliefs, but

En son fond durable, la foi n'est rien de plus qu'un sentiment indestructible de confiance en la vie et en sa valeur morale.¹

Le principe de cette foi est intérieur, et ce n'est pas le monde extérieur qui nous l'a suggérée. Elle a donc jailli du fond mystérieux de l'humanité.²

Une force impérissable est dans la foi, non pas dans cet abus de la foi, l'adhésion contrainte de l'intelligence à de faux mystères que la raison a construits et qui seraient à garder comme une révélation immuable, mais dans l'intuition et le sentiment-, instinct supérieur de l'homme, -qui nous font faire confiance à la vie, à sa signification et sa valeur morale, à la perfectibilité de l'individu et de la société à l'avenir de l'humanité.³

Given Loisy's descriptions of faith, one might view the current religious crisis as one in which beliefs lack the necessary correspondence to faith resulting in a lack of confidence in life and its "moral value." There is a conflict between the depth confidence in life present and future and the religious articulations designed to express it.

As with his ideas on religion, there is no difficulty in per-

¹ Alfred Loisy, La Religion, 2d ed. (Paris: Nourry, 1924), p. 187.

² Ibid., p. 182.

³ Ibid., p. 314.

ceiving the divergence of those on faith from orthodoxy. Orthodoxy tends to emphasize dogmatic faith and to identify all genuine faith with it. Loisy sees a relationship between faith and dogma but its closeness depends only on how skillful an articulation of faith a particular dogma is for its time. This kind of "aesthetic distance" from dogma presages its decline and eventual disappearance, at least in the ironclad forms it tended to assume in the Roman church of that time. Dogma as "teaching" would have to remain as long as the human race since the need to articulate its experience and its beliefs would never disappear.

If this chapter has indicated that Loisy was indeed a mystic and that his apologetics was a mystical one it will have accomplished its purpose. But I hope it will have accomplished something else as well by pointing out that Alfred Loisy has something to offer to fundamental theology, an approach that is worthy of further consideration and study.

CHAPTER V

NEW WINESKINS FOR NEW WINE

Was Alfred Loisy an atheist or a mystic? Un Mythe Apologétique unequivocally affirms his mysticism and should finally lay to rest any lingering suspicions about his atheism. If he has an "answer" for S rapion in his own apologetics it is always the same one: "le Myst re." This is not the answer of an atheist or even of many theologians, but it is the answer of a mystic.

What of his "apologetics"? Has it any function other than the negative role it plays in Un Mythe? I think it has. Certainly Un Mythe hoped to persuade the reader that "orthodox" wineskins of the Guitton variety were totally inadequate for the new wine. Another approach was necessary if the religious consciousness of modern man was to be adequately described. But does Loisy leave us any directions for the construction of these new "containers"? Yes and no.

Loisy saw with great clarity and necessary imprecision both the situation in his own time and that of our own. He saw what John C. Meagher expressed so succinctly thirty-eight years after his (Loisy's) death:

I contend, for instance, that it is both inconsistent and self-destructive for Theology to disavow History as a source of revelation and a canon of self-criticism. I also contend that it is ultimately ruinous for Theology to insist that the Book bypasses the historical conditioning to which other ancient documents are evidently subject. I suggest that the traditional theological assumption that history apparently propounded by the Book is

reliable history, and the traditional theological assumption that the Book is the record of direct privileged communication from God, are both probably false, certainly implausible, and procedurally untenable.¹

He foresaw the "ruinous" results of the Church's refusal to admit in practice what no one would deny in theory: that we now live and move and conceptualize in a post-Copernican cosmos. (We also live and move and conceptualize in vastly more confusion because of that refusal.) But he has an "answer" for those who seek a way out of the confusion, the same "answer" he gave to Sérapion: "le Mystère." There are no explicit directions for making new wineskins beyond allowing ourselves to become intoxicated with the Mystery to such an extent that ways to preserve the new wine of our heightened understanding will manifest themselves.

Of course fear has played an enormous part in the reluctance of Theology and the Church to lay aside the dead skins shed by eras long entombed in history. But if we understand what Loisy means by his distinction between faith and belief we will see that such fear is not simply cowardice in the face of the unknown or the new, but an act of faithlessness. If, as Loisy contends, faith is the deep reality which generates beliefs, shedding them when they no longer correspond to that faith or are no longer adequate to express it; then only loss of that faith could be cause for concern. The outgrowing of theological theories can be accepted almost as simply as the outgrowing of our clothes or of our other ideas.

¹John C. Meagher, "Pictures at an Exhibition: Reflections on Exegesis and Theology," Journal of the American Academy of Religion 47 (1979): 3-20.

Does this denigrate the role of Theology which is busy weaving theories destined ultimately to be supplanted by others? No. It simply describes more clearly what Theology has always been doing but hasn't been able to admit until now. By removing the absolutism from Theology we take nothing from its substance; it is not changed. All we do is remove a falsehood, a shadow it has been casting.

Some of our fears proceed from the excess rationalism with which we have been infected since the Enlightenment and to which the present world seems to be reacting with an excess of animality. There is a fear that with the shedding of our old clothes we will shed something of ourselves, lose our religious heritage, perhaps accidentally throw away our identity. Again, Loisy would accuse us of a lack of faith.

Perhaps more faith in "le Mystère" would free us to see the theological task in simpler, deeper and more traditional ways. We need not lose the intellectual precision acquired from our centuries of ratiocination. The alternative to the recent past is not some theological equivalent to the primal grunt. But such an increase in faith might relax us to the point of allowing our "mystic roots" to indicate the direction we should take. That is, I believe, what Un Mythe Apologétique is ultimately about.

If Loisy has a contribution to make through his apologetics it is founded in his mysticism which would not allow him to confuse the secondary with the primary in religion.¹ He is a reminder that those

¹This confusion is the cause to which the Rev. Alfred Fawkes,

who would find a path in the wilderness will only do so in so far as they adhere tenaciously to the One and, by so doing, are always able to discern that One from the many images and concepts which must never be allowed to take Its place.

The wineskins are in the making. Particularly since Vatican II, evidence of leakage from the old variety has been overwhelming. Efforts in the direction of theology as myth-making or story abound and proceed from an understanding of our nature that is not too far from Loisy's. Another view, of Theology as iconographer, belongs to the cluster of conceptualizations which is producing the new wineskins:

Good icons are knowledgeable accomplishments, not mere fantasies. They do not pretend to represent only the observable, nor do they prefer to represent the observable as it is historically observed. they are formulaic attempts, on or even apart from historical occasion, to evoke the presence of mysteries which the mind has glimpsed, to remind us of an ancestral heritage of worship, to "tease us out of thought," as that splendid theologian John Keats would put it, so that we might remember that history does not set the boundaries to the truth, that we may not substitute critical understanding for reverence, that our controlled knowledge is not so complete or accomplished as we sometimes habitually assume, and above all that our memories mix with our longings and our joys to put us in touch with our deepest sense of home.¹

Clearly some of us are moving in directions taken by Loisy before us. If so, the unceasing labor of his life, his faithfulness to the vision seen in the dark glass, was not in vain. And perhaps we

M.A. attributes Christianity's reluctance to adapt to a changing environment:

"For whatever may be the case with its local and temporary forms, there is no reason to think that Christianity is incapable of adapting itself to the changed and changing life of the world. Its failure, in so far as it has failed, is, it seems, the result of the secondary in religion having been made the primary."

Studies in Modernism (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1913), p. x.

¹Meagher, p. 17.

are come to a place on the road where it is appropriate to thank rather than to castigate him for his terrible stubbornness and his jealous defense of "le Mystère."

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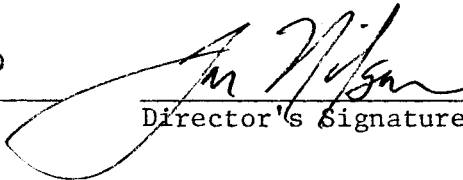
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The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

April 16, 1980

Director's Signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jon Nilson", written over a horizontal line.