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## EDITORIAL

### DR. J. GRESHAM MACHEN AND THE LEAGUE OF EVANGELICAL STUDENTS

On January 1, 1937, God called from our midst and unto Himself the Rev. J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D., Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary and a Trustee of the League of Evangelical Students. In the passing of Dr. Machen the whole Christian world has sustained an irreparable loss. Nowhere will the loss of this great leader and friend be felt more keenly than in the student-world. It was in the student-world that Dr. Machen's heart lay; it was there that he gave his life in utter abandonment to the cause of Christ. Dr. Machen loved students. This is seen with particular clearness in Dr. Machen's devotion to the League of Evangelical Students. From its very inception the League of Evangelical Students was close to his heart. To the very end he remained one of the *League's* most helpful and faithful friends.

Twelve years ago some students of the old Princeton Seminary returned from a meeting of a students' association now popularly known as The Interseminary Movement. At this meeting of theological students a spiritual state was disclosed which resulted in the open denial of Jesus Christ as God's only begotten Son and man's only Saviour. The Deity of Jesus and John 3:16 were rejected as a doctrinal basis of that association. It was even declared by one of the students that "Buddha could save us as well as Christ." There were Christian leaders then as there are now who counseled these students to stay within this blasphemous movement and to try to "leaven the loaf"—as if by staying in a movement that denied our Lord we could ever raise a testimony to our Lord. In loyalty to Christ these students and many others formed a separate movement on an evangelical basis and named it The League of Evangelical Students. Several of the Professors of this seminary bitterly opposed the *League*. One Professor even refused to permit the use of student body stationery bearing his name for purposes of furthering this League of Evangelical Students. What did Dr. Machen do at a time like this? Though to befriend these loyal students meant enmity in high places, Dr. Machen stood openly with these students. Their reproach he made his reproach. Under the hostility of personal attack which became cruel and bitter he did not for one moment forsake these students who were standing for the Lord Jesus Christ. He befriended them; he encouraged them; he counseled them; he defended them in high places. He loved them.

Throughout the twelve years of the *League's* existence Dr. Machen continued one of its most faithful and interested friends. Exceedingly busy man that he was, he was always willing and anxious to minister to the needs of students. When he was needed as a speaker at *League* Conventions he would give liberally of his time and means to make that possible. Pressed with the duties of a teacher and a church leader, he would travel hundreds of miles to speak to a humble

## DO SCIENTISTS TODAY BELIEVE IN GOD?

CORNELIUS VAN TIL, TH.M., PH.D.

When we ask the question whether scientists to-day believe in God we really ask the question whether they believe in the God of the Scriptures. And when we ask whether scientists to-day believe in the God of the Scriptures we really ask the question whether science today believes in historic Christianity. We are not interested in asking whether, like the country mouse, the scientists believe in "some sort o' somethin'" that they may call God. Liberal clergymen like Edward H. Cotton have done that for us.<sup>1</sup> They have discovered that scientists almost invariably believe in some sort of God and have rejoiced in that fact. But this is not an intelligent procedure. The main question must always be what sort of God men believe in.

In seeking an answer to our question whether scientists today believe in the God of the Scriptures we are concerned only with those scientists who have openly expressed themselves on the subject. We shall not seek to analyze in detail the attitude of the "experts" who claim to make no religious profession of any sort. These "experts" do in reality, we believe, manifest a certain attitude to the God of the Scriptures.

The God of the Scriptures claims to be the creator and sustainer of the universe. Scripture teaching consistently tells us that whether we eat or drink or do *anything else* we are to do it all to the glory of God. The "expert" ignores this claim of God. He ought to make sure then that the God of the Scriptures does not exist. His "neutral" attitude is not really intelligible till he does this. The "expert" is like the man who goes hunting in the woods ignoring any possible signs of ownership that he might see. Such an hunter simply takes for granted that he can kill the game and take it home with him. He gives no thought to a possible game-warden.

We believe therefore that the attitude of the "expert" is uncritical and unscientific on this point. He takes for granted that the universe has sprung into existence somehow and that it just continues to exist somehow and that it is just going somewhere somehow. And in this very assumption he shows that he does not believe in God. Of course, there are scientists who in their hearts believe in God, but we are speaking of a consistent intellectual attitude. And a consistent intellectual attitude on the part of a scientist would seem to be that he would either recognize God and honor Him in all the work he does or seek to be sure that God does not exist in order to justify his neglect of God. And it is to the representatives of those who have expressed themselves openly on the question of the existence of God that we now turn.

If we ask Robert A. Millikan whether he as a scientist believes in God he will tell us that he most certainly does. In evidence of his belief he quotes a little poem:

"A fire-mist and a planet,  
A crystal and a cell,  
A jelly-fish and saurian,  
And caves where cave-men dwell.  
Then a sense of law and beauty,

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<sup>1</sup> *Has Science Discovered God?* 1931, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., N. Y.

And a face turned from the clod.  
Some call it evolution  
And others call it God."

To this little poem he adds the words: "That sort of sentiment is the gift of modern science to the world." (*Science and the New Civilization*, p. 15). For Millikan God and nature are completely interchangeable terms. (Op. Cit., p. 37, "a nature or a God, whichever term you prefer" and p. 95 "But nature or God, whichever term you prefer"; see also p. 185). The fullest statement that he gives of this conception of nature as identical with God is as follows: "The God of science is the spirit of rational order and of orderly development, *the integrating factor in the world of atoms and of ether and of ideas and of duties and of intelligence.*" To this he adds: "Materialism is surely not a sin of modern science." (Op. Cit., p. 83).

In short we see that according to Millikan science to-day justifies us in holding to some sort of idealism. Materialism and mechanism are dead, he says. But surely this sort of idealism is no essential approach to the Christian religion.

In proof of the contention that such an idealism is no essential approach to historic Christianity and the God of the Scriptures we can point to Millikan's own rejection of specifically Christian doctrines. For Millikan there are three ideas that have been most valuable to the human race. They are:

"The idea of the Golden Rule;  
The idea of natural law  
The idea of age-long growth, or evolution"

Now Jesus, according to Millikan, was simply, "the greatest, most consistent, most influential proponent" of the idea of the golden rule. (Op. Cit., p. 167). "When he said, 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you even so do ye also unto them, *for this is the law and the prophets.*' I take it that he meant by that last phrase that this precept epitomized in his mind all that had been commanded and foretold—that it embodied the summation of duty and aspiration." (Op. Cit., p. 168). According to Millikan the life and teaching of Jesus has significance solely in the fact that it brought about the spread of the idea of the golden rule. And he adds: "The significance of this event is completely independent even of the historicity of Jesus" (Op. Cit., p. 168).

This then is what Millikan thinks that science today warrants our believing, namely a vague pantheism in which historic Christianity is reduced to the illustration of abstract values. In short, Millikan thinks that recent science justifies us in believing modernism rather than Christianity.

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We shall ask one more of the present day scientists to tell us somewhat fully what he believes about God and Christianity. Bernhard Bavink, in his book, *Science and God*, tells us again and again that materialism is dead and that mechanism is buried in the depths of the sea. He rejoices, he says, that in our struggle against materialistic politics science now stands side by side with Christianity in its belief in God. The theologian need no longer fear "the presence of scientific literature in the hands of his flock—for matters are now in such a position that any one who has understood physics even a little is simply proof against the nonsense of materialism." (Op. Cit., p. 170). But what then may we believe instead of materialism?

To this question the answer of Bavink is in effect that we may now believe some vague sort of pantheism. "When a great artist composes a work of art, say a Beethoven symphony, it is meaningless to say that he has interfered here and there with his own work. For while it is being created it exists only in him and through him. We must hold firmly to this fundamental principle in all circumstances, even when we speak in the Christian sense, of the contrast between God and the world, that is, the sum of individual wills. *This contrast lies in the realm of values, not that of existence.*" (Op. Cit., p. 127). Or again he says: "I actually believe that we are justified to-day in view of the present state of knowledge, in asserting that, although it is not certain, it is easily possible and to some degree probable, that the whole conflict between faith and unfaith, which, as Goethe said, will never cease, will as a result be really concentrated in the only realm where it has any meaning, namely that of values, and hence of the problem of theodicy. This position must, I feel, be made clear today, to the educated layman at least." (Op. Cit., p. 167).

If then we may believe this leading American and this leading German scientist we should be very careful in saying that science to-day is favorable to the belief in God. Nor would it be difficult to show that Millikan and Bavink are fairly typical in their views of what many leading scientists believe. So, for instance, for Einstein God is identical with certain ideals of truth, goodness and beauty in the universe (*Has Science Discovered God?*, edited by Edward H. Cotton, p. 94). For Michael Pupin God is a principle of "Creative Coordination" in the universe (Idem, p. 201). Edwin H. Conklin says: "What lies back of evolution no one knows" (p. 86) but adds a little later "Undoubtedly chance has played a large part in the evolution of worlds and of organisms, but I cannot believe that it has played the only part. (Idem, p. 88). William McDougal is very insistent that there is purpose in nature but equally insistent that this purpose is, as far as we know, *within* nature only. He cannot believe in the teleology of the theologians. (Idem, p. 148).

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But we shall not continue to give quotations from scientists to prove that, generally speaking, they do not feel that they can believe in God. We shall rather seek to ascertain whether perhaps in spite of themselves we are entitled to saying that recent scientific discoveries are favorable to Christianity.

#### CREATION

Now one of the points at which there has been a great deal of debate between theologians and scientists is the question of the origin of the universe. Historic Christian-theism says that the universe is created by God out of nothing. Ancient philosophy contended that the world had an eternal existence of its own. Now on this point, we are told, science and modern philosophy have disagreed with ancient philosophy and have practically adopted the point of view of Christian-theism. A recent theologian, speaking of the Biblical assertion that the world has had a beginning says: "In all antiquity, the Bible stood alone in making this assertion. All science now stands with it, as witness the most recent views of Sir James Jeans and others. This is the first assertion of the Book, and it is of overwhelming importance. Agreement here means more than disagreement almost anywhere else."

Now the objection to saying that science and theology both agree that the world has had a beginning without saying anything further is based on the fact

that even if this were true we should have really no approach to the Christian doctrine of creation. The agreement would at best be *negative*. Suppose both science and the Bible say that the world has had a beginning but science says that the world has had its beginning in Chance while the Bible says that the world has had its beginning by the creation of God. Is it a real advantage from the Christian point of view if science says with Sir James Jeans that the universe has *come into existence* of itself *without* God rather than if science says with Plato that the universe has *always existed without* God. The only advantage would seem to be that the ancient view teaches fatalism while the modern view teaches fatalism backed by Chance.

As far as the origin of the universe is concerned, then, the nearest approach to the Biblical doctrine of creation on the part of recent scientists seems to be this doctrine of Chance. But Chance is the very opposite of creation. Scientists, in practically every field today, accept the evolution theory as a fact and that not merely in the biological but also in the cosmical sense of the term.

#### PROVIDENCE

In the second place we may ask whether recent science has in any real sense returned to the Biblical doctrine of providence. But the answer to this question is really involved in the answer to the question with respect to creation. A universe that comes into existence by chance must run itself in its own strength. It is safe to say that as modern science has, generally speaking, accepted the universe as an ultimate or non-created entity so it has, generally speaking, accepted natural law as working independently of God. The rejection of the providence doctrine has therefore been very general. The following quotation from Kirtley F. Mather is typical: "Philosophically, as well as scientifically, there has been a tremendous advance from the time when the universe was believed to operate in obedience to caprice or passing whim, when Jehovah repented to-day for what he had done yesterday, when events were conditioned by the odors of burnt-offerings that assailed his nostrils, when Jove became angry in a fit of very manly temper and did things which later he would greatly regret." (*Science in Search of God*, p. 107).

Now apart from the misinterpretation of the Biblical conception of providence that such a statement gives, it pictures Science as teaching that the realm of natural law is beyond the control of God.

But granted that science has till recent times held that natural law operates entirely by itself we ask whether the recent changes in physical theory have not changed all that. We are told that in recent times physicists have changed their conception of natural law so that all things do not work in perfectly predictable fashion. We are told that laws are nothing but the average behavior of the physical elements. We may compare this concept to the laws of averages as employed, for instance, by insurance companies. An insurance company can predict with considerable accuracy how many people will die in a given year but it cannot say anything about any one individual. Speaking of this Bavink says:

"But if this is true, then 'chance,' that is to say the determination of the singly-occurring elementary event, which is not calculable, suddenly plays a decisive part again in what had hitherto been determined with absolute certainty by statistics. The world then would be so constituted—it would not be remarkable if it were so—that its foundation, the elementary act, would be completely free (or a matter of chance,) while the resulting struc-

ture would be statistically calculable with at first moderate, then ever increasing accuracy as far as the realm of physics and chemistry, while at a sufficient degree of complication, an upper limit to the applicability of statistics would be reached, since we should then be dealing with structures, which on account of their complication would only be very rarely, and finally never, repeated." (Op. Cit. p. 108)

Now if we stop to consider for a moment such a presentation of the laws of nature we see that we have in it nothing that approaches the Christian conception of providence. The whole difference between the mechanistic conception of natural law that prevailed some time ago and the present view seems to be that at present Chance gets its due more directly than it formerly did. The laws of nature are now conceived of as mere statistical averages working according to probability which itself floats on chance.

This is what we should expect. After all, if one does not believe in creation and providence the only consistent alternative is chance. The fact of change must be explained. If it is not explained as the result of the plan of God who is Himself unchangeable it must take place of itself. A philosophy of Chance is the only complete alternative to the creation and providence conception of the universe. Science today basing itself together with science of yesterday upon the assumption of the self-existence and self-operation of the universe has no way to turn but to chance if it is no longer satisfied with fate.

#### MIRACLE

In close connection with the conception of providence is the conception of miracle. In fact, from the Christian point of view the one is impossible without the other. It is only if God by His providence controls the laws of nature that He can work His miracles in nature. We cannot reasonably expect therefore that with the current conception of providence we should find a belief in the Biblical concept of miracle. The only thing that we can reasonably expect is that men shall believe in the possibility of *strange* events. Formerly scientists said that a sufficiently brilliant intellect might predict all future events in accordance with irrevocable law. Now science says that laws are mere statistical averages and that events are in themselves unpredictable. But can we hope that miracles will come out of chance any more than they will come out of fate? Bavink says quite truly: "It is a complete error to attempt now to uphold belief in miracle, in the ordinary sense of the word, by basing it upon the purely statistical character of natural law." (Op. Cit., p. 131).

What we may expect, however, according to the laws of statistical averages is that, say once in a septillion years, a brick will jump into the brick-layer's hand as he waits for it or that other unheard of things may happen that are fit for Ripley's *Believe It or Not* display on a world fair. Bavink gives us an illustration of this when he says:

"Let us take the example we have cited from Perrin of the tile. When this falls off a roof, there is a possibility every  $10^{19}$  that chance unevenness in the distribution of molecular pressure may give it a considerable impulse sideways, and thus, for example divert it from the head of a passerby which it would otherwise have struck, if its fall had taken place according to the normal (that is to say average) law of falling bodies. But if the argument is put forward in theological quarters that the possibility of a miracle is thus proved the result would only be to damage theology's own case. For in the first place as we have seen, the probability is so small that it may be regarded as practically identical with impossibility. If one such tile had fallen every second since the beginning of the history of humanity,

no noticeable fraction of the time would have passed which, according to Perrin, would be necessary for the case to occur. And secondly even if such an immeasurably small possibility should actually once be realised, there would be again a second, almost equally great, improbability that it should happen just at the very moment when the passerby, who was to be 'providentially protected,' was under that particular roof" (132). "Similar considerations apply, for example, to the walking of Peter on the water, which is naturally also imaginable as a result of unequal molecular pressure, but even less probable, and other miracles." (Op. Cit. p. 132).

Now if such things as a jumping brick are to be called miracles in a loose sense it is well but it ought to be plain that such "strange" events have nothing remotely in common with the Scriptural idea of miracle. The strange events of recent science spring from a source other than God; they spring from chance. The strange events of modern science signify nothing in connection with the plan of God inasmuch as they take place independently of the plan of God.

That there is no approach to the Biblical conception of miracle in modern science can be seen still more clearly if it be noted that with the changed conception of law men of science may think they can explain the Scriptural miracles without bringing God into the picture more plausibly than ever before. We have already cited from Bavink to show that Peter's walking on the water may now, according to science, perhaps be explained by a strange molecular pressure that chances to take place say every few billion years. So too the negative critics of the Bible need no longer bestir themselves to devise all sorts of theories in explanation of the empty tomb of Christ. They can now turn to the scientists for help. These scientists are no longer bound by hard and fast rules as to what can happen. They now believe that most anything can happen. Even the resurrection of Christ can happen. Of course if it did happen these scientists assume that it happened in accord with the laws of chance in some such way as Perrin's tile fell from the roof. And in that case it would be no miracle at all. Speaking of this whole point of view William Adams Brown says:

"To prove that an event is a miracle in the sense in which Aquinas or Calvin believed in miracles, it would be necessary not merely to show that it had not yet been possible to assign it to its place in any observed sequence, but that it never would be possible to do so in the future, which manifestly cannot be done.

"Many modern opponents of miracles are content to rest their case at this point. They do not deny the possibility of miracles, but only the possibility of proving that any particular event is a miracle. Take any of the miracles of the past, the virgin birth, the raising of Lazarus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Suppose that you can prove that these events happened just as they are claimed to have happened. What have you accomplished? You have shown that our previous view of the limits of the possible need to be enlarged; that our former generalizations were too narrow and need revision; that problems cluster about the origin of life and its renewal of which we had hitherto been unaware. But the one thing which you have not shown, which indeed you cannot show, is that a miracle has happened; for that is to confess that these problems are inherently insoluble, which cannot be determined until all possible tests have been made." (*God at Work*, p. 170).

For such reasons as these Brown concludes that the whole of the orthodox conception of miracle must be given up. Says he: "Must we, therefore, admit that the religious significance of the Biblical stories has been impaired and the evidential value of the events they record has been disproved? Such a conclusion would inevitably follow if the older methods of proof were correct. But modern defenders of miracle are not willing to admit that this is the case. The religious significance of miracles, they tell us, is not impaired by any progress

which we may have made toward a scientific understanding of their antecedents, for the very simple reason that the quality which gives them their significance for religion lies in a region to which the methods of science cannot penetrate." (Op. Cit., p. 111).

We adduce these quotations from Brown merely to show that liberal theologians are seeking to show that their conception of miracle rather than the orthodox one is favored by the recent changes in science. Now since science today, generally speaking, reduces the Biblical concept of miracle to a chance occurrence and liberal theology in effect does the same thing there is a striking similarity between the view of science and the view of liberal theology. Both conceptions are diametrically opposite to the Christian conception of miracle.

What then, in conclusion, must our answer be to the question, "Do Scientists To-day Believe in God"? We can only reply that the recent changes in scientific theory have not really led men any closer to the acceptance of the God of the Bible. We rejoice in the work of scientists. They have recently, more than ever before, shown us the marvels of God's creation. We may even rejoice in the fact that materialism and mechanism have largely been discarded. But in simple honesty we can see no real approach on the part of leading scientists to historic Christianity.

When we present the message of Christianity on the college campus we do well to face the actual situation. We cannot say to men that they can retain the favor of such men as Jeans, Eddington, Einstein, Millikan, Bavink, etc., if they accept historic Christianity. To do so would be to obscure the message of the gospel. It would be a vain attempt to take "offence of the cross" away. We should rather ask men to count the cost.

If we do this faithfully we need not be discouraged. All the conclusions about Christianity on the part of scientists are but philosophical conclusions. When Jeans tells us about the marvels of the universe we honor him, but when he tells us that the universe must somehow have sprung into existence by itself some billions of years ago, we demur. When Bavink analyzes the concept of law we listen attentively but when he concludes that natural law, whether mechanical or statistical, shuts out God, we need not follow him. When Bavink tells us about the strange events of nature we smile but when the resurrection of Christ is put into the same class with the jumping brick we rebel. We honor scientists as scientists; as philosophers they are no wiser than other men. If as philosophers they gave signs of approaching the Christian-theism of the Bible we should rejoice, but since in their philosophy they have immersed themselves more deeply than ever in the sea of Chance, the God of the Scriptures as the one absolute, rational Being back of all that happens in the universe stands out more clearly than ever as the only alternative to the destruction of human reason.

