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ARCHIVES

Some Scriptural Aspects of Processes in Nature

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NATURE is like a veil. It both reveals and conceals the truth. What William Taylor says of the parable may also be applied to nature: ". . . a cloud luminous to some, yet dark to others; the enveilment, but also the unveiling, of the truth to men."¹ If nature appeals only to our intellect, we shall see only that which lies on the surface. The deeper truths can be apprehended only by faith. Man's attitude to the incarnation of the Deity in Christ corresponds somewhat to his approach to nature. He who lacks spirituality will see nothing but mere humanity in the person of Christ, but to the spiritual-minded the Incarnation is the clearest revelation of God the world has ever seen. When the unbeliever approaches creation, he sees only natural processes, but their beginning must always remain a matter of speculation to him. The discerning believer, too, sees natural processes, but to him their beginning and operation are no mystery, for each involves the imposition or superposition of a new power which was not there before and which nature itself, without the exertion of divine creative power, could never have developed or acquired.

LUTHER A LOVER OF NATURE

Luther demonstrates the devotional approach to nature:

Martin Luther loved nature more worshipfully than anyone who lived before or after him. He was so thrilled by structures and phenomena which he observed with the unaided senses, that our reaction, as we view the mysteries which are revealed to us by the telescope, microscope, X-rays and film, and other aids, appears feeble by comparison. He thanked "our God more for a tree or a shrub than all the peasants thanked for their acres," because he was a Christian. As such he contemplated not "nature" but God's creatures, the work of the Almighty. We ought to recapture such a worshipful attitude. Erasmus praised the "homely mistress Nature" (*die schlichte Meisterin Natur*), Paracelsus sought her "light," Pirkheimer and all the humanists studied her . . . and Melancthon spoke of her laws. Martin Luther was unacquainted

with this strange fiction called "mother" or "great generatrix" (*grosse Zeugemutter*), also enchantress . . . invented and pushed to the fore by men who were retreating from God. He recognized only the Creator and His creation. Therefore this sharp-sighted realist discovered more and nobler things in the sky, on earth, in man and animal and plant than did the scientists, artists, poets, and thinkers. As he saw it, the creation was not to be explored or counted, nor was it for speculation or sensual perception merely, but it was there to be contemplated in faith. . . . Not enchantment nor poetic aura hovered around creation (as was the case with the later romanticists), but immediately it bears the marks of the divine hand. With extraordinary simplicity of faith he stood in the world of creation: A child in the garden of the loving Father whose gifts are forever fresh and beautiful. The slogan of the shallow thinker is: "There are no miracles, it is all 'nature.'" For Martin Luther it was turned about: "There is no 'nature,' there are only God's miracles. All is miracle."²

Luther gives us much to learn.

RETREAT FROM GOD

This "retreat from God" already in progress at Luther's time has continued down to the present, with this shocking difference, that it is no longer a *retreat*, but an *escape* from God accomplished. Karl Heim calls this "secularism,"³ and in his six-volume work entitled *Der evangelische Glaube und das Denken der Gegenwart*, he re-orientes science in a truer perspective. He describes the "secularist."

The question used to be simply: Is there a God or is there no God? There were religious and antireligious people, theists and atheists. Today in the age of technology and great world wars, the rift has become much deeper. Today, in all civilized countries, there stands, on the one side a mass, increasing on an ever more alarming scale, of people who are not atheistic or antireligious or anything of the kind, but who see no meaning at all in the whole question about which atheists and theists used to quarrel, and who consequently view it quite dispassionately and without interest. They have no idea what the others are so excited about. . . . It is as though two people were looking up at the starry sky on a clear winter night. One of them points at a place in the sky where he sees a brilliant star which he is convinced is the central sun by which the whole cosmos is moved. But the

other does not understand him at all; for however intently he fixes his eyes on the point in the sky which his companion has indicated to him, he could swear that there is nothing there, and indeed that there never can be anything there.⁴

The great revolution which Huxley predicted is all but fulfilled, so it would seem.

The spirit which has fathered this "escape from God" finds also among us voices which inadvertently proclaim its doctrine. How often we have heard of late: "You are what you do!" a catchword which some educational theorist has used, but which has a Freudian stigma clinging to it. It is difficult to put into words the sinking feeling which comes over one when emotional behavior is presented as a push-button affair, and with a finality that leaves little room for the thought that this mysterious process perhaps involves something which lies in the deeper inner regions, into which an explanation based on the analogy of a machine cannot reach. "There are fewer miracles today than in the past," and other similar statements are made. Yes, also among us such remarks are heard. It is so easy, and such a temptation, to use phrases, definitions, whole sentences and paragraphs ready made for us. But often, if we use them thoughtlessly, we actually say something steeped in the spirit that leads away from God. What a tremendous switch of the point of view can be made when one defines, e.g., *adaptation*. Any text will say: "It is a modification of an organism fitting it to its environment." The implication is that the modification, or adaptation, is developed out of necessity. If we feel uneasy about using this definition as it is and therefore give it a little thought, then we will say: "It is a structure which obliges an organism to live in a specific environment." What was wrong is now right unless we are ready to subscribe to the evolutionary principle of adaptation.

It is not always such an easy matter to discover the objectionable elements in a definition or in an exposition. The manner in which ideas, structures, functions, etc., are grouped may add to the difficulty of an analysis. The definition of "adaptation" is one of these. The term includes permanent structures and seasonal structures or modification, e.g., the flipper of a whale, and the seasonal change of the haircoat of a hare or a horse. To designate a permanent

structure as an adaptation is objectionable. The conventional definition can stand as a seasonal adaptation or modification. Thus two definitions must be used to cover everything included under the conventional term of "adaptation." But after we have formulated our two definitions, we notice that an undesirable element still clings to the word "adaptation" itself if it is used to designate a permanent structure. This can be eliminated in no other way than by discarding the word altogether. Hence, in the solution of this one apparently simple problem we retain the conventional definition so that we can put into words what others are thinking. But to keep our thinking straight we must choose two definitions and a new term.

LIMITATIONS OF THINKING

In our sciences we meet with difficulties which involve the limits of our thinking and imaginative ability. Mathematically we can calculate with more than three dimensions. But if in our imagination we attempt to leave the three dimensional space in our desire to get some sort of a conception of a fourth dimensional space, we shall always fall back to the space with which we are familiar, the three dimensional. Here we are frustrated like a little child reaching for the moon, which it has noticed for the first time. Similarly, in our sciences, everything from the galaxy to the electron must be explained mechanically. There seems to be no other mode of exposition within the capacity of our mind. This method is at its best when we are operating in the field of the physical sciences and shows its inadequacy most when we attempt to explain life or some processes of life. But no matter how this method of exposition is applied, it is, at best, no more than a one-sided picture which it can depict. Hence, when someone says that he has a "clear conception," he can really mean nothing more than that he has a "mechanical" conception of the thing under consideration. Kenneth Walker⁵ refers to this when he writes:

If religious formulations are to be condemned for their anthropomorphism, scientific formulations must equally be condemned for their mechanomorphism, and there is no reason to believe that a description of reality in terms of machinery gives a more objective account of it than a description in terms of personality.

This mechanomorphism of science does explain somewhat why science is utilitarian and materialistic, for it is at its best when devising machines and instruments.

There are two other contributing factors which, among others, helped to bring about this "escape from God." The first is again intimately connected with one of the peculiarities of our mental processes. We show a strong preference for analyzing whatever we have under observation and study. Each part is carefully examined and described with the aid of microtechnique, qualitative and quantitative analysis, and the like. Often we become so absorbed in our fragments that the whole becomes obscured, or we lose sight of it altogether, with the final result that while we think we have a complete picture, we really have only a mosaic in which some pieces may be missing. Darwin once complained that he was much concerned about the fact that he was losing all aesthetic feeling and appreciation of beauty in nature. This is of course to be expected of a fragmentizer. What today would be decried as a defect and as ignorance, actually was a great advantage to Luther. The creature did not arouse his curiosity, he was not impressed by numbers, he was not excited into theorizing; but a deep awe came over his heart, for through the creature he was again brought into the presence of the Creator.

DENIAL OF PURPOSE

Disregard and denial of meaning and purpose in nature is the second contributing factor to the escape from God. The chief concern of scientists has always been to explain natural phenomena by employing the analogy of a machine. This explaining is done largely by measurement and statistical analysis. Anything which will not submit to such treatment is disregarded. Any truth which is not concerned with provable facts lies outside the sphere of such scientific investigations, and so it is treated with silent indifference. Thus only certain relationships are considered. Any relationship which cannot be investigated statistically is treated as though it existed not at all. As a result scientists and laymen have assumed the absence of all meaning and purpose. "If meaning and purpose cannot be found in the world and in life," so they think, "then there is none to be found."

We must be content if most of the time we get an answer to the question "How?" We must never expect to get an answer to the question "Why?" This question implies meaning or purpose. This is unfair, so we are told. But this is the question which is of such deep concern for us human beings and which from earliest years has loomed very large in our minds. We began to ask it as children and keep on asking it till the end of our life. However much we may evade answering this question in our sciences, this will never erase from the human mind the *idea* of meaning and purpose in nature as long as there remains a vestige of belief in the divine. The "secularist" has not even this vestige and cannot therefore understand at all anything which concerns itself with meaning and purpose.

"PEACE IN HIGH HEAVENS"

How refreshing it is to change from the language of cold, impersonal science to the sublime words and conceptions of the Scriptures! Read, if you please, Newton's *Principia* if you would know about law and order in nature. It will leave you cold. It will not cause any inner stir. It seems to leave you out there somewhere, so far away. The Bible does not go into detail, but definitely presents law and order in nature, in its own peculiar language, often the language of appearances, which is universally understood. Science knows much about some of the details. It knows about some of the secondary processes and causes and effects involved in law and order in nature. This fragmentary knowledge only serves to accentuate the sublimity and the grandeur of the Scriptural concepts of the Bible. In its presentation the Bible sweeps across the world and the visible heaven and includes in its grasp not only a vastness of detail, but always maintains a firm hold on the fact and idea of law and order in nature.

Law and order are established in the remote departments of nature, the high places. Ps. 119:89, 90 *: "Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Thy faithfulness endures to all generations; Thou hast established the earth, and it stands fast." The remotest or highest *space* (relation of star to star) is firmly fixed by the Word. No age is without the Lord's faithfulness or

* The R. S. V. is quoted unless indicated otherwise.

truthfulness.⁶ That this language refers to natural things becomes clear by comparing it with Psalm 33:6: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth." The thought of these two passages is that the "breath of His mouth," or utterance of His mouth, is not only the originating word (creation), but that there is a continuing going forth of it (preservation), or a prolonged sounding of it in the creature, or nature which it originated. Without this prolonged sounding the heavens would collapse, and the stars would flicker into darkness. It is the same thought expressed Col. 1:15-17: "... all things were created through Him and for Him (v. 16) . . . in Him all things hold together (v. 17)." The Scriptures have nothing to say about numbers and ratios in this connection, or whether these cosmic ordinances operate according to direct or inverse ratios of the squares or the cubes of the distances involved, but they leave no doubt that laws are established and harmony exists in the heavens. Of these mathematical ratios the Hebrews knew but little, even as we know but little more. To have such mathematics in the Scriptural presentation would add nothing to the devotion of the reader. Its very absence makes it easier to think: "My Creator, my God, and my Preserver." The coldness of factual knowledge, mentioned earlier, is replaced by warmth, and by a feeling of security that rests in the hand of God. Ps. 119:90, 91: "... Thou hast established the earth, and it stands fast. By Thy appointment they stand this day; for all things are Thy servants." Job 25:2: "... He makes peace in His high heaven." Peace is another name for concord, harmony, order, constancy, law.

The author of Psalm 119 knew about law and order in these remote regions, and Job knew it. These ancient authors called peace and harmony what Newton called gravitational attraction, but they were as sure of law and order in the heavens as Newton was or Kepler, who found among the planets his scientific inspiration. The ancient authors with a sentence or two give us a sublimer impression of these laws of nature than the others give after all their labors.

COVENANTS WITH NATURE

This same idea of law and order is expressed in respect to the other departments of nature. In Gen. 9:8-17 *covenant* is mentioned seven times. Twice the text has: "I establish My covenant"; three

times: "sign of the covenant"; twice: "remember My covenant," the last of which has the additional qualification "everlasting," "My everlasting covenant." Luther explains this persistent reiteration with the lovely picture of the mother who tenderly again and again comforts her little child just spanked by the father and reassures it and pats its head to still the deep sobs which continue to come long after the sting has gone. Thus God reassures Noah and his sons after the Flood.⁷ Here "covenant," Luther continues, is not to be identified with the promise of the Seed, since covenant concerns natural blessings and benefits animals and all creatures as well as man. These blessings, which were to accrue to all the creatures and man were the establishment of order in nature, and cycles of time which were to continue to the end of time (everlasting). Divine operations in nature are elsewhere given the name covenant, as in Jer. 33:19: "Thus says the Lord: If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also My covenant with David, My Servant, may be broken. . . ." We see, then, here a transfer of the word "covenant" also to inanimate things, just as we transfer our word "law" from rational and moral to physical agencies. The idea of natural law is clearly stated in the Bible, but the Bible never descends to the empty thought of a law without a Lawgiver. "When He gave to the wind its weight and meted out the waters by measure; when He made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then He saw it and declared it; He established it and searched it out" (Job 28:25-27). Law and Lawgiver are mentioned side by side.

"FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH"

Passages of the Bible which refer to the "foundations of the earth" (Ps. 102:25; Job 38:4), "pillars of heaven" (Job 26:11), "pillars of the earth" (Job 9:6; Ps. 75:3), "windows of" or "in heaven" (Gen. 7:11; 8:2; 2 Kings 7:2; Mal. 3:10), especially if windows are connected with rain, and other passages which use poetical language, or the language of appearances, have evoked criticism of the Bible. "Crude conception of the universe!" "The sky, a great dome supported by pillars!" "Windows to let down rain!" "Doors in the east and the west for the rising and setting

sun!" Such and similar phrases are put down as betraying the ignorance of the ancients. The implication is, "We moderns have the truth." It is true the Bible does not deal with these phenomena mathematically. It does not go into detail. To do that is the business of science. Yet the Bible is not only close to the truth; it also gives us the ultimate truth. For example: The ultimate support of the earth is God's almighty power. Today we speak of the theory of gravitational attraction. Few of us ever know this theory as one of the boldest assumptions in human thought. If we can find it under the unattractive dust which usually buries it in the Introductory Physics course, and come to realize how it has apparently solved problems which have plagued man for ages, we shall be thrilled with admiration. If we stay with Newton's theories till after the thrill has died down, we shall soon begin to ask: "How? Why?" and get no answer. Now we are plagued more than ever.

That old story which tells of the earth resting on the back of an elephant, which stands on the head of a turtle, which stands on something else, and so *ad infinitum*, had its own way of saying: "The world is held by something." The Greeks had their myth about Atlas, which was a personification of the force which holds the earth. Modern science tells us little more than this: "The earth is held by something." It takes Watts to put it into sublime words:

Earth with its caverns dark and deep
Lies in His mighty hand.⁸

"ALL IS MIRACLE"

Luther reflects the spirit of the Scripture when he says: "All is miracle. There is no 'nature'; there are only God's miracles." The Bible does not distinguish between ordinary processes in nature and wonders or miracles, as we do. Lewis calls attention to this fact, and then goes on to say that the single term used for the miraculous, or wonderful, is the term *pele*, which has the primary idea of a thing or an act separate and standing by itself.⁹ Gesenius says the root means *aussondern, auszeichnen*. In a footnote Lewis also calls attention to another term "used to denote the bringing about of an event special and remarkable by a series of causes strictly natural or moral, or mainly such, yet continually deflected

or turned around to the production of a certain result." The term is *sibbah*, a bringing about, or around, *Wendung, Schickung Gottes*. The term is used 1 Kings 12:15, and in the parallel passage 2 Chron. 10:15, and it is translated "turn of affairs" (R. S. V.), "cause" (K. J. V.), with God initiating the events.

In idea the Scriptural distinction between the natural and the supernatural is clear. Still, in the Psalms, and in Job particularly, a sharp line is not always drawn between the natural and the supernatural as is generally done today. In celebrating the praises of God, "who alone doeth wonders," the holy writers are as likely to call a *wonder* that which is today called natural. In Job 26 both kinds of acts of God are mentioned. Yet the chapter concludes: "Lo, these are but the outskirts of His ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power, who can understand?" *Grenzlinien seines Weges nur is Umbreit's* translation of the first part of this passage. All is miracle.

The great deeds of God, the wonders as presented in the Books of Moses, and the Books of the Prophets, exhibit the supernatural more than the natural. The natural is in the background in the passage of the Red Sea (water), the fire and voice from Sinai (thunder, lightning), the smiting of the rock in the Wilderness, etc. In the Book of Job, that which today is called a natural phenomenon is exhibited as a wonder: the elements, wind, storm, thunder, the marvelous productions of the animal world. Psalm 29, the Thunder Psalm, begins with an invocation to the angels to "ascribe to the Lord glory and strength" as He prepares for an exhibition of His almighty power in a thunderstorm. Lewis, whose argument is presented above, continues:

One class of events is regarded as much the work of God as the other. In both representations, moreover, is there a mingling of the two ideas. In the supernatural displays, such as that of the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Egyptian plagues, the providing of food in the Wilderness, there is more or less of natural intervention linked in and distinctly mentioned as forming a part, at least, of the process. And then again the great natural is so described in Job and the Psalms, that the awe of the supernatural is upon us, and we receive the impression of the divine presence as distinctly as though it all had been a miracle.¹⁰

This wonderful intermingling of the natural and supernatural in Scriptures is beautifully expressed by Watts and Cowper when they sing:

We sing th' almighty pow'r of God,
Who bade the mountains rise,
Who spread the flowing seas abroad
And built the lofty skies.

Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed
Where'er we turn our eyes,
Whene'er we view the ground we tread
Or gaze upon the skies!¹¹

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.¹²

We are not always aware of it, but we come face to face with the natural and the supernatural in our daily life. With Luther's exposition of the First Article we confess: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses." Thus we confess: "God is the ultimate Cause." The secondary causes we seek to discover in the laboratory. There we learn much about the natural processes operative in the development of egg and sperm, in fertilization, in the embryological development, until another human being passes from that first dark but sheltering cosmos into that larger one which is shared with many others, and where it continues to live all its life under the influence of the natural and the supernatural. However grand and mysterious the world may be into which such a human being is born, yet it is grander, shrouded in greater mysteries, and is more "fearfully and wonderfully made," as our "soul knoweth right well," for the Creator has declared it in these very words (Psalm 139 [K. J. V.]).

The Bible presents such blending of the natural and the supernatural also in the Genesis account of Creation. Gen. 1:11 reads: "And God said, 'Let the earth put forth. . . .'" The term used here is *tadshe* and is causative; so Harper translates: "[she] shall cause to spring forth."¹³ The earth is obedient, for verse twelve

reads: "The earth brought forth." Here the form is *wattotse* and is rendered by Harper:¹⁴ "and [she] caused to go forth."¹⁵ In verse twenty the creative word is spoken *to the water*, but the causative form is not used. "Let swarm the waters swarm(s) . . ." is Harper's¹⁶ literal translation of the beginning of this verse. The causative form does appear in the Septuagint and the Vulgate. In the next verse the natural drops out of sight for the moment and only the divine is presented to the reader: "So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves. . . ." Next the Creator again turns to the earth, again comes the strong causative declamation: "Let the earth bring forth . . . and so it was." The next, the twenty-fifth verse, reads: "And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds. . . ." In verses twenty-six and twenty-seven, where the creation of man is announced, the supernatural only is accentuated. But in Gen. 2:7 the natural is mentioned: ". . . then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground. . . ." These creations were mediate. The divine creating Word was always the first cause, and continued exerting itself also when the secondary causes were in operation. The medium has no power of itself, but this power was superimposed on the nature, *die Natur, physis*, by the Creator.

In the creation of the dry land the word was spoken to the water. In the creation of the firmament, or the expanse, again water was involved. But when it comes to the creation of light, we can say nothing of mediate creation.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All of this has also a bearing on our practical life. We have insisted too much on making a great distinction between the natural body of man and its processes and the body of the animal. Luther has something to say about this matter, and as he does, he becomes a bit coarse (*grob*): "*Denn so du auf das natürliche Leben, davon hier Moses redet, siehest, so wird sich kein Unterschied finden zwischen einem Menschen und Esel. . . .*"¹⁷ Luther has more to say about this, but his thoughts soon come back again to the divine image and the Incarnation, and then he is sublime. There are a few Bible passages which will have something to do with our thinking on this matter.¹⁸ Eccl. 3:19-23: "For the fate

of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?" See also Ps. 49:13-21. There are other things which we have in common with the animals. The animals are held responsible for mutilating the body of man. The "eye for eye and tooth for tooth" principle applies to them as well as to man (Ex. 21:28-32). There is sackcloth and ashes and fasting also for the animals when Nineveh repents (Jonah 3:7-9). The animals are included in what Paul says Rom. 8:19-23. The animals wait with eager longing together with us; they will be set free from bondage together with us; they groan in travail together with us; they wait as do we. What a scar sin has made on creation!

But there is another practical consideration that ought to be mentioned. If creation has nothing of the natural involved, but only the supernatural, then science which seeks to investigate the early beginning and past history of the earth (geology) or seeks to discover something about animals of the past (paleontology), is overreaching itself. Then it is not moving in its own sphere, for it can take hold of a problem only if matter and energy, or forces, are involved. But since both the natural and the supernatural are involved in creation as it is presented by the Bible, these sciences, as long as they concern themselves with the natural processes, with matter, with natural energies and forces, are legitimate, just as much as embryology, physiology, physics, and chemistry are. When we speak of the natural, we always view it as it is seen from a Scriptural basis.¹⁹ The devout and believing scientist will always see much that is below the surface. Hence, he will have a deeper insight into a process than the unbeliever. If a devout believer and a rabid unbeliever tackle a problem which involves no ethical, moral, or religious elements, but is strictly intellectual, it is very likely that they will come with solutions which are all but identical. The solution of a strictly scientific problem can be found by an unbeliever as well as by a believer. But the latter will always begin with the ultimate Cause, of which the other knows nothing. The natural processes involved in the formation of dry

ground, the rising of the mountains, and the sinking of the valleys (Ps. 104:7, 8) can be investigated by a geologist. He may even speculate and theorize as long as he remains within the framework of the Bible. Which theory of geology is preferred is, then, nothing more than an intellectual problem. A devout Christian can be a geologist without any need of a *sacrificium intellectus*.

The first impulse is to recoil from the idea of a blending of the natural with the supernatural in the creation account. That is so because two ideas have influenced our thinking. It is easy to understand how this thinking came about. Creation in every feature has been considered supernatural. Everything that has happened since then has been considered the uninterrupted natural with the exception of a few interspersed miraculous events. Miracles so-called are few when compared with all the wonderful things the Lord has done since Creation. Myriads of them are around us everywhere all the time. But being natural and familiar we accept them as a matter of course, while if some deception artist comes along with his hocus-pocus and apparently makes a coin disappear before our eyes, we applaud with admiring enthusiasm. Had we been more like Luther, we never would have lost sight of the supernatural in every natural process. That only the supernatural has been associated with creation is easy to understand, easier to understand today than it would have been fifty years ago. During the past hundred years science has asserted itself tremendously. The more it did, the more has spread the notion that science and technology are the world's benefactors. Today even the common man naively believes in the ability of science and technology to solve all his and the world's woes. This notion gave rise to the excessive naturalism of our day. The reaction among the pious and the seriously devout gave rise to excessive supernaturalism. We have given way to the thought that a miracle so-called is a greater and more dignified display of God's majesty and power than a so-called natural process. Likewise the sudden, the momentary, is more befitting the divine majesty and power than the slow and gradual, we have thought. Luther is entirely right. In the last analysis nothing is natural.

In Luke 1 we read of a work of God which transcends even the creation of the world and of man. Creation or shaping, if you

please, of this present world began when "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." The Incarnation planned in eternity, and announced ages ago to the first parents, began when, according to Luke, the same brooding, or quivering, or hovering Spirit, came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her. "Conceived by the Holy Ghost," we confess. From here on the Incarnation was carried forth by natural processes. It was all so natural, in fact, that had it not been for the preaching of the angel sent by God, we men could never have known "this great thing, which the Lord hath done." We cannot explain the Christmas miracle, but we can in spirit reverently bow our knees with the shepherds and adore with hearts moved by joy and gratitude for what the Lord has done. Thus we confess and believe and preach the Incarnation, which transcends any other work of God. There is nothing here from which the believer shrinks. The natural brings the Child as Brother; the Divine calls for awe and adoration. The unbeliever is indifferent to it all, or he is repulsed.

It seems that a great change in our thinking, especially as to man, is in the making. "This mind of ours is desperately sick. A present-day poet has accurately termed it 'a place of disaffection.'"²⁰ A re-evaluation of our thinking has begun. The worship of humanity (humanism) is being exposed as an actual degrading of man when it insists that he is the product of his environment. So props are being knocked from under much of our educational philosophy. Excessive counseling and guidance are late children of humanism. The mechanomorphic view of man is losing face. The theories of emotional behavior, psychology, conditioned reflexes, etc., are being crowded off the stage by the psychosomatic view of man. The man who emerges again is endowed with not only a *soma*, but also a *psyche*, which shows an independence and an autonomy that cannot be manipulated like a machine nor investigated by the multifarious tests which have threatened to rob man of the last vestige of privacy. Matter is more of a mystery today than ever, for no one is certain whether it is energy or matter. Strangely enough, the little atom, too, is cutting capers. Isolated atoms act in an unpredictable manner. Therefore, the absolute prediction of effect when the cause is known is viewed with skepticism. Hence determinism is less determined today. The most assuring trend is the movement back to religion, led by leaders

in the sciences, such as Hugh S. Taylor,²¹ Dean of the Graduate School and Professor of Chemistry of Princeton University, to mention just one. We may not be aware of these movements, but they have begun. Our thinking, which has been shaped by these theories for so long a time, has set, like a gel, which must become solvent again before it can be molded in another form. Perhaps nothing will slow up this movement more than indolent indifference which asks: "What of it?"

Milwaukee, Wis.

NOTES

1. William Taylor, *The Parables of Our Saviour* (New York: Hodder & Staughton, Geo. H. Doran & Co., 1886), p. 11.
2. Wilhelm Praesent, *Alles ist Wunder: Martin Luther beschaut die Schöpfung* (2d ed.; Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1950), pp. 5, 6. Translation mine.
3. Karl Heim, *Der evangelische Glaube und das Denken der Gegenwart*. Vol. I, *Glaube und Denken*; Vol. II, *Jesus der Herr*; Vol. III, *Jesus der Weltvollender*; Vol. IV, *Der christliche Gottesglaube und die Naturwissenschaft* (see item 4 below).
4. Heim, *Christian Faith and Natural Science*, trans. N. Horton Smith (New York: Harper Bros., 1953), p. 151.
5. Kenneth Walker, *Meaning and Purpose*, Pelican Book A211. Penguin Books (Middlesex: Harmsworth, 1950), p. 128.
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