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Religion and the Modern World Picture*

By THEODORE GRAEBNER

The scientific world picture has undergone greater changes in the past forty years than in the preceding four centuries. For one thing, the materialistic view which controlled the study of the cosmos has crashed. But that is not all. To adapt our idea of the physical world to the demands of reason "requires of scientific thought one of the greatest changes in orientation which it has ever had to make in its secular effort." The words are those of Louis de Broglie in the volume announced (p. 261). With it has changed the attitude of physical science towards religion. Today no first-rate scholar would concentrate his resources on as negative a subject as "The Warfare of Science and Theology," as set forth in two large volumes by Andrew D. White. In fact, no scientist today writes books against theology, or Christianity, or religion. De Broglie, one of the greatest physicists of modern times, recipient of the Nobel Prize, writes a volume on the New Physics, touching on every modern concept like electricity, light, magnetism, gravity, relativity, wave mechanics, and the atom theory, and he discusses the philosophy of this new knowledge in six profound studies without so much as suggesting that the truth of religion is involved.

Dr. du Noüy, another winner of scientific prizes, a director of the Sorbonne, launches a direct investigation into the meaning of scientific theory for the estimation of man's worth and destiny. His work *Human Destiny* defends the proposition that only religion can fulfill the highest ideals of science and that Christianity even at its lowest estimation is the world's only hope.

The third volume announced is frankly apologetic. Its author teaches philosophy of religion in Northern Baptist

* This article is in the nature of a review of the following three books:

Human Destiny. By Lecomte Du Noüy. Longmans, Green and Co., 1947. 290 pages. \$3.50.

Matter and Light, The New Physics. By Louis de Broglie. Translated by W. H. Johnston. Dover Publications, New York, 1946. 300 pages. \$2.75.

Remaking the Modern Mind. By Carl F. H. Henry, M. A., Th. D. Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1946. 307 pages. \$3.00.

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Theological Seminary, Chicago. His criticism of recent theories concerning the evolution of the human mind rests upon the study of a very large number of recent scientific and philosophical texts and opposes the reasonableness of Christianity midst the confusion which attends the remaking of the modern mind.

The difference in plan and purpose of the three volumes announced above is easily recognized. Louis de Broglie's *Matter and Light* is an extremely scientific text, treating the present teachings of modern science concerning the nature of matter and radiation and the laws which rule the motions within the atom. Like other popular interpretations of modern physical theories, this work endeavors to make clear the speculations of scientists who operate entirely with mathematical formulae. It seeks to do this for the benefit of the reader who is not acquainted with higher mathematics, so that throughout the book you will find mathematical equations only on a dozen pages. The result is extremely unsatisfying. To the non-scientific reader much of the book is incomprehensible verbiage. I refer to the statement (p. 139) that the simplest manner of defining the photon, or corpuscle, of light would be to compare it to a tiny body "having an electric charge and mass, both equivalent to zero." A little farther down the mass of the neutrino is declared to be zero. Elsewhere (p. 256) the proposition is laid down that according to the new mechanics "the positions and the velocity of the electrons *have no real existence.*" What saves these doctrines from the charge of being utterly absurd is the fact that speculations dealing with these concepts have given us the radio and television, and have demonstrated the frightful reality of "non-existing positions and motions" of the electron in the explosion of the atomic bomb. We gather from de Broglie's new book the conviction that science today deals freely with contradictory propositions, both of which are true — as, for instance, the proposition that light is made up of corpuscles (*things*) and that light is a form of radiation, a wave (*an event*). Hence we are able to understand why the modern scientist hasn't the courage or inclination any longer to impugn the mysteries of religion.

Lecomte du Noüy's *Human Destiny* is a best seller. (The author died in New York City September 22 at the age of 64.)

Three factors have contributed to the favorable reception of this book — its charming style, its optimism, and its militant defense of divine intervention into affairs of the universe and of man. The author looks forward with confidence into the future history of mankind. The present stage of man's evolution is "only an intermediary stage between the past, heavily weighed down with memories of the beast, and the future, rich in higher promise. Such is human destiny" (p. 225). It all depends upon following the ideals of Jesus, whether "the pure and spiritual race is destined to appear one day" (p. 141). It may be that the transformation which will end in the superior race "will require a sustained effort for hundreds of centuries" (p. 177). But even now great personalities arise in the mass of mankind "who have fully understood the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, of which they have been the stage, and who have triumphed over matter; they alone represent the evolutive group and are the fore-runners of the superior race which is to come" (p. 187).

Unfortunately there is here no recognition of the meaning of Jesus as the Christ. The author regrets the average man's clinging "to traditions, legends, dogmas, sometimes beautiful, impressive or touching, but almost always without relation to his rational instruction" (p. 216). Man's sinfulness is but a remnant of an earlier brute stage of evolution. But through the origin of conscience there is a spiritual spark in man, and now men must understand that "the important thing is to develop what is within them, to purify themselves, to better themselves, to come closer to the perfect ideal which is Christ. The rest is secondary" (p. 180).

Du Nouÿ is as little satisfactory on the scientific side. He is absolutely committed to an evolutionary theory. A single experiment, the nature of which he does not describe, has convinced him that acquired characters in plants and animals may be inherited — this against the testimony of every modern text in biology (for the evidence see the present writer's *God and the Cosmos*, third edition, pp. 252—258). He believes that the human embryo reveals gill slits, which argue for an earlier fish stage in man's evolution (on this "gill slits" see *God and the Cosmos*, pp. 376—386). However, there is in *Human Destiny* a strong effort, which runs through the book, to demonstrate that materialistic evolution is untenable, that

there are countless miracles in the origin of animals and plant species and that there is a God and Creator. Life itself is an insoluble mystery. The gap between living and non-living is unbridged. No transition can even be conceived. Indeed, a chapter is given to the mathematical demonstration of "the impossibility of explaining today the birth of life by means of pure chance, that is to say, by our actual human science" (p. 27). The belief that man is descended from the ape or the monkey is held by no one today (pp. 66, 94). No one can account for the origin of the backbone. There is no trace of any transition form between amphibians and fishes, between fishes and reptiles, between reptiles and mammals. He chides the rationalist for believing in the neutrino, a paradoxical entity, "yet obstinately refusing to admit the possibility of a supernatural, creative power without which the greatest scientific problems are incomprehensible" (p. 136). The scientist "invents an invisible element, without dimensions and without mass, which does not exist, has never existed and will never exist in reality, and yet is absolutely necessary to enable him to define the sphere which he cannot conceive otherwise. This strange element is the 'center'" (p. 159). Yet he rejects the notion of a God who has invested him with the gift of conscience and of liberty.

The unresolved inner conflicts which make *Human Destiny* an unsatisfactory book are unflinchingly met in Prof. Carl F. H. Henry's book *Remaking the Modern Mind*. In the Christian message alone, Dr. Henry believes, we will find a self-consistent solution for the perplexities of human experience. The fundamental error of the rationalist, his belief in the inherent goodness of man, is dealt with historically, ending with the "astonishing deficit so undeniably disclosed by the recent trend in world affairs" (p. 69). Fundamental concepts of modern science, such as the idea of the uniformity of nature, are next analyzed. Referring to the work of Max Planck, Werner Heisenberg, and, more recently, Professor Scheim of the University of Chicago, it is pointed out that the continuity of force in nature has been shaken to its very foundations. As for the Darwinian hypothesis, "many philosophers and scientists alert to the quantum theory consider this interpretation of evolution doomed" (p. 107). And the emergent evolution (so strenuously defended by Lecomte du

Noüy in Human Destiny) is properly characterized as a last desperate effort to maintain the evolutionary principle in the face of the piling up of contrary evidence. A very full chapter is given to the various forms of the hypothesis of emergent evolution — that is, of an evolution of plants and animals that has operated with sudden jumps (large mutations, etc.).

One is pleased to note that Dr. Henry operates with modern source material and shows a wide acquaintanceship not only with writers in the field of theology and ethics but also with modern nature philosophers. He records the recent turn of C. E. M. Joad from long-standing agnosticism to theism. The unsparing criticism which Joad has recently poured out upon those who try to harmonize belief in a personal God with the emergent evolutionary scheme is worth re-quoting here. Joad says in *God and Evil*, p. 144: "The fact that like the more recent work of philosophical physicists, it (the doctrine of emergence) was welcomed by theologians is, I am afraid, evidence only of the degree of discouragement which led them to grasp at so deceitful a straw. For the willingness of theologians to acclaim any and every doctrine which seemed hostile to materialism, affords melancholy testimony to the desperate straits to which the success of materialism has reduced them. It also affords testimony to their inability to see beyond the ends of their dialectical noses. It is almost as if, after doing battle with the materialists, they had said, 'Any enemy rather than this one.' This eagerness to make use of any stick which seemed likely to be serviceable for the beating of so formidable a foe has blinded the orthodox to the fact that this particular weapon was, if I may mix my metaphors, double-edged. The presence of the dangerous edge quickly becomes manifest, if we examine some of the implications of emergence" (p. 155). And again on the wider question of the scientific method and the insights of religion: "A thing may be a mystery in the sense that it is not and cannot be explained or understood by the methods of science, yet no mystery at all, if methods other than those of science are admitted as valid" (p. 157; quoting Joad, *God and Evil*, p. 164). While certainly not an orthodox churchman, Joad today rejects "the entire doctrine of emergence as inadequate, now postulates the existence of a personal, ethical God, who is the creator of the universe and is himself not subject to

a process of development, as the most satisfactory view" (p. 160). The chapter concludes with the cogent statement that emergent or theistic evolution "comes upon the modern scene as a competitor and not a forerunner of the Christian world-life view" (p. 167).

The student of modern philosophical systems will find much of value in the chapters that follow, with their keen criticism of the era from Descartes to Dewey as "an apostate phase in the history of world thought—a progressive experiment that proved the most costly in the wayward annals of man" (p. 265). We were pleased with this reply to the Roman Catholic argument which for propaganda purposes not only identifies the Reformation and the Renaissance but also traces to Luther many modern ills including Nazism. Dr. Henry's criticism is: "Not infrequent is this note that the ailments of modern society all derive from the revolt against authority, of which the Reformation is a part. In all such treatment the truth is obscured that whereas the Renaissance movement revolted against all supernatural authority, the Reformation to the contrary revolted against the authority of human popes and councils in the interest of the absolute authority of the divine revelation given in the Scriptures. It is not a return to the word of man, but to the Word of God, unobscured and undistorted, that alone holds the promise of a better tomorrow" (p. 282).



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