

PROFESSOR J. GRESHAM MACHEN

His Life and Defence of the Bible

by

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CHAPTER III

THE METHODS OF MACHEN'S APOLOGETICS

The primary interest of Professor Machen is to be found in the field of Apologetics. His whole life's purpose may be summed up in the one supreme ambition, and that was to defend the Christian Faith against the various forms of attack which are constantly leveled against it. Speaking in general terms we may say that he spent his time and energy in the defense of the Bible. In his book, "The Christian Faith in the Modern World," 1936, he devotes a beautiful chapter to the question, "Shall we defend the Bible?"¹ We do justice to him by listening to his own words. "I believe with all my soul . . . in the necessity of Christian Apologetics, the necessity of a reasoned defence of the Christian faith, and in particular a reasoned defence of the Christian conviction that the Bible is the Word of God."² His life's purpose is perhaps stated in wider terms when he writes, "I certainly do believe in the necessity of the reasoned defence of the truth of the Bible. I have felt it to be my duty to engage in it myself, to the very best of my very limited ability . . ."³ As we make a close study of Machen's works we, however, find that his Apologetics did not include the whole scope of the Bible truth, but was rather definitely limited especially to a defense of that truth against Modernism. This statement must again be qualified by stating that this apologetic interest was largely limited to the question, "Is Christianity True?" He says, that for many people this question has no meaning whatsoever, because they regard Christianity to be merely a life in distinction from a doctrine. As a matter of fact, Christianity is much more than a life,--it is a life founded upon a message, upon an account of something which it declares to have happened in the first century when the

1 Cf. p. 59-72.

2 Cf. *idem.* p. 62.

3 *Idem.* p. 65.

Son of God wrought redemption through His death and resurrection. The evidence for the truth of the Christian message is ample. The central question is the New Testament account of Jesus. "Christianity is true if the New Testament account of Jesus is true; it is false if the New Testament account of Jesus is false."⁴ In his major works, Prof. Machen concerns himself with the question, "Is the Bible right about Jesus?"

THE MAIN ISSUE. His main issue with Modernism is referred to repeatedly in his articles and works. Briefly stated it is this: "Jesus of Nazareth, according to the Bible, was no product of the world, but a Saviour come voluntarily into this world from without. His entrance into the world was a stupendous miracle. While He was on earth He manifested a wonderful control over the forces of nature. His death was no mere martyrdom, but an event of cosmic significance, a sacrifice for the sins of the world. His resurrection was no mere vain aspiration in the hearts of His disciples, but a mighty act of God. That is what the Bible says about Jesus." This Biblical account is faced by an alternative account, according to which, "Jesus was the fairest of the children of men. He lived a life of wonderful purity and unselfishness. He was conscious of a wonderful closeness to God. He felt that He had a mission to bring others to that closeness of relationship with God that He himself had. In order to impress His sense of that mission He was unfortunately forced to use the categories of thought that prevailed in His day, and so He made the claim to be the Jewish Messiah. At first He won the favor of the crowd, but since He would not be the kind of leader that they desired He fell under their condemnation. He fell a victim, finally, to the hostility of the leaders of His people and the cowardice of the Roman governor, and died the common death of the criminals of that day upon the cross. After His death His disciples were utterly discouraged. Even when He had been with them they had been far inferior to Him in spiritual discernment and in courage, and now that He was taken from them, what little power they might have had seemed to be gone. They fled from Him in cowardly flight in the hour of dire need. But then after His death they began to meditate upon His life with them, and as they mused thus upon their intercourse with Him, the impression that His person had made upon them was too strong for them to believe that He had perished. Predisposed psychologically in that way, they experienced certain hallucinations . . . they thought they saw Him, and perhaps they thought that they heard a word or two of His ringing in their ears. These pathological experiences were the means by which the influence of Jesus was continued upon the earth; they were the means by which those weak, discouraged disciples were changed into the spiritual conquerors of the world!"⁵ This is a general statement of the issue between Machen and the modern theology. By

4 Cf. "The Bible To-day," May, 1923, "Is Christianity True," p. 197.

5 Cf. "Is the Bible Right about Jesus?" address given at Bible League meetings in King's Hall, London, June 10, 1927.

sharp argumentation, Prof. Machen tried to demonstrate that this modern view of Jesus is wrong, and that what the Bible says of Jesus is correct. This modern view has been advocated by men like Bousset, Wrede, Heitmuller in Germany, and by Fosdick, Shailer Mathews and a host of others in America.

Prof. Machen uses very sharp words when he speaks of this so-called "Liberal" view of Christ. This can be seen from such utterances as these: "Such men are further removed from the Christian faith than unitarians, inferior in the plain matter of honesty."⁶ At another place he says, "the great redemptive religion, which has always been known as Christianity, is battling a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology . . . the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism--that is, in the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity."⁷ We are told that this liberalism is "un-Christian" as well as "un-scientific."⁸ Thus Modernism is designated as a religion distinct from Christianity.⁹

In his Apologetics Machen classifies himself with the "conservatives." In this connection we must not, however, misunderstand this term, since he says, "we as 'conservatives' do not desperately hold to old traditional beliefs just because they are old. On the contrary we welcome new discoveries. In one sense we are indeed traditionalists,--we do maintain that any institution that is really great has its roots in the past."¹⁰

Speaking of controversy, we are told that though it should not certainly be fostered where it is not necessary, yet when necessary it should not be avoided. The church should be made aware of the great issue of the day. Calamity has often resulted because the raising of the issue has been postponed. "The New Testament itself is very largely a controversial book; Paul's hymn to Christian Love in the I Cor. 13, is a part of a controversial passage; and much of the gracious teachings of our Lord is rendered plain by being set over against what was said by the scribes and pharisees. And in the whole history of the church it is in the time of conflicts that great revivals come."¹¹

PROF. MACHEN WAS NOT FUNDAMENTALISTIC IN HIS APOLOGETICS. As one reads through the books and articles which appeared from his hand, it

6 The Moody Bible Institute Monthly, Apr. 1923, Art. "Christianity vs. Modern Liberalism," p. 349.

7 Cf. Christianity and Liberalism, 1934, p. 2.

8 Idem., p. 7.

9 Cf. What is Faith, p. 102.

10 Cf. What is Faith, 1935, p. 18.

11 Cf. The Union Seminary Review, Jan. 1927. Art. "What is the Gospel?", p. 161.

becomes very evident that he was far from a Fundamentalist in his Apologetic work. Perhaps the question arises, what is Fundamentalism?

For the answer to this question we refer the reader to an article by Prof. Dr. V. Hepp on "Gereformeerde Progressieve Theologie" which appears in the book titled, "Koers in die Krisis," Stellenbosch, 1935. Prof. Hepp finds the main characteristic of "Fundamentalism" in that this movement concentrates its energy upon the fundamentals of Christianity. "Men concentreerde zich op de grondwaarheden van het christendom."¹² In its attack upon Liberalism, Prof. Hepp continues, it has done excellent work. "De fundamentalisten bestreden de liberalen met succes."¹³

It is true that Machen centered his attention upon Modernism, but this was not done because he only regarded certain truths which are popularly termed "Fundamentals" to have value for the Christian Faith, and not the whole realm of doctrine. Prof. Hepp correctly says "begint men in de Schrift te schiften tusschen hoofden bijwaarheden, dan ligt het zondig oordeel voor de deur als een het neit zoo nauw, of men die loochent, komt er minder op aan. Aan de eenheid van God's waarheid wordt de schennende hand geslagen."¹⁴ With this statement Machen is in full agreement. This can be seen from the fact that he emphasized all the doctrines of the Reformed faith. In his radio addresses which now appear in several of his books, he constantly stressed the whole system of theology which is known as Calvinism. Had his life been spared, it is safe to say that this feature of his work would have received even more emphasis in the coming years, because there is a marked advance in this during the closing years of his life. By that, we mean, that during the recent years he defended the whole Calvinistic system of theology more specifically than in former years. This of course also had its reasons. Machen at the end of his life especially felt himself called to give definite leadership in this respect because of his new affiliation with the new Church organization with which he was so intimately connected.

Machen emphatically rejects the term "Fundamentalism" as a name applied to the group of Presbyterians to which he belongs. "The term 'Fundamentalism' seems to represent the Christian religion as though it suddenly became an 'ism' and needed to be called by some strange new name. I cannot see why that should be done. The term seems to be particularly inadequate as applied to us conservative Presbyterians. We have a great heritage. We are standing in what we hold to be the great central current of religious life--the great traditions that came down through Augustine and Calvin to the Westminster Confession of Faith. That we hold

12 Cf. p. 157.

13 Idem, p. 157.

14 Cf. idem, p. 159.

to be the high road of truth as opposed to vagaries on one side or on another. Why then should we be so prone to adopt some strange new term?"¹⁵ In his autobiographic sketch Machen states,--"I hold, 1. that the Christian religion as it is set forth on the basis of the Holy Scripture in the Standards of the Reformed Faith, is true, and, 2. that the Christian religion as so set forth requires and is capable of scholarly defence. The former of these two convictions makes me dislike the term 'Fundamentalism.' If indeed I am asked whether I am a Fundamentalist or a Modernist, I do not say, 'neither'. I do not quibble. In that disjunction as the inquirer means it, I have very definitely taken sides. But I do not apply the term 'Fundamentalist' to myself. I stand indeed in the warmest Christian fellowship with those who do designate themselves by that term. But for my part I cannot see why the Christian religion, which has had rather long and honorable history, should suddenly become an '-ism' and be called by a strange name."¹⁶

In this connection we should like to call attention to the fact that though Machen fostered a high regard for that which is traditional, yet he was not a slavish follower of the past merely for the sake that it belonged to the past. There is a grave danger today to look upon the past and the traditional as a norm for the present and future. Professor Hepp correctly warns those of the Reformed persuasion against this deceitful tendency to which they are inclined. We as Reformed Christians have a past to be proud of, and that is why we are so prone to look upon the past as our norm and look upon the whole structure of theology as already completed, as though there was no more constructive work for us to accomplish. Original work is in this way discouraged and we satisfy ourselves with compiling the thoughts together of our fathers who have gone before, without observing that upon the foundations already laid we must continue to rear our theological structure. It is because of this tendency which is so prevalent among us that we gratefully observe in Prof. Machen on the one hand a due regard for that which is traditional, but on the other hand he also aspired to advance and move forward. Says he, "We who are reckoned as 'conservatives' in theology are seriously misrepresented if we are regarded as men who are holding desperately to something that is old merely because it is old and are inhospitable to new truths. On the contrary, we welcome new discoveries with all our heart; and we are looking in the Church, not merely for a continuation of conditions that now exist but for a burst of new power. . . ." ¹⁷ From this we see that even though Machen classified himself as a conservative Presbyterian, the term "conservative" must be used in its right sense, and not made to mean a slave of the past just because it is

15 Cf. The Presb. Guardian, Nov. 5, 1935, p. 38.

16 Cf. Con. Am. Theol. 1932, p. 270.

17 Cf. M's autobiographic sketch in Con. Am. Theol. 1932, p. 269, 270, also in this connection cf. Art. by Prof. Hepp in "Koers in die Krisis," 1935, titled. Ger. Progressieve Theol., p. 154 f.

past.

Fundamentalism and Premillennialism are not to be identified as meaning the same thing. The outstanding characteristic of Fundamentalism is that it centers all of its attention upon a few doctrines which it regards to be fundamental and leaves the rest of the Scripture untouched. But since the two are so very often associated together, we would like to mention in this connection that it can also be said of Machen that he was not a Premillennialist. He regards their interpretation of Scriptures as "an excessive literal method of interpretation, which is not really in accord with the meaning of the Apostolic writings." In this same connection he refers to the belief that Christ will reign a thousand years upon the earth, the two-fold resurrection from the dead, etc., as based "upon an interpretation of New Testament passages which is not altogether void of plausibility; but on the whole they are at least doubtful in view of other passages and especially in view of the true nature of prophecy."¹⁸

When the question was raised, whether a person who holds the Premillennial view can be regarded as a Calvinist, or "in other words, hold truly to the Calvinistic or Reformed system of doctrine which is set forth in the Westminster Standards," Machen answers, "We think that he can; and for that reason we think that Premillennialists may become ministers or elders or deacons in the Presbyterian Church of America. Machen, however, distinguishes between Premillennialism in general and the teachings of the Scofield Bible. Of the latter he writes, "But we mean very definitely that if a man really does accept all the teachings of those notes, according to their real meaning, he is seriously out of accord with the Reformed Faith and has no right to be a minister or elder or deacon in the Presbyterian Church of America."¹⁹

PROF. MACHEN A REFORMED APOLOGIST. From what point of view did he defend the Christian faith? The positive answer must be, from the Calvinistic or Reformed viewpoint. Prof. Machen must be classified as a Reformed Apologist in the true sense of the word. It is hardly necessary to substantiate this statement by a compilation of quotations, because it runs like a thread through all of his productions. How truly gratifying is his continued and repeated admiration for the old Reformed Faith. In the preface to "The Christian View of Man," 1937, he states very explicitly--"the author believes that the Reformed Faith should be preached, as well as taught in the classroom, and that the need for the preaching of it is particularly apparent at the present time. The author is trying to preach it in his little book, and preach it very specifically to the people of our

¹⁸ The Westminster Department Graded series, Student's Text Book, Part 4, p. 282.

¹⁹ Cf. The Presb. Guardian, Nov. 14, 1936, p. 42.

generation." He then states that this book does "seek to show that the Reformed doctrine of sin and grace, is not something useful merely to the theologian but a matter of the most vital concern to every man."²⁰ When he draws toward the end of this book Machen comes with an earnest warning against Pelagianism. He takes his stand foursquare upon the basis laid by Prof. Warfield to whom he acknowledges his great indebtedness for what he is saying.²¹ He also expresses agreement with the Systematic Theology of Charles Hodge in this same connection. How positively he expresses his agreement with the old faith when he says--"I for my part rejoice greatly in trying to stand in the great current of the Reformed Faith. If I can show you a little bit of what that great system of doctrine is, and a little bit of the basis for it in the Word of God, the purpose of these talks will have been fully attained."²² What is done is not only to show us "a little bit" of this great system of doctrine, but, it may be said, that much of it was brought forward in this printed series of radio talks. Repeatedly he expressed his full agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith.²³ Machen's Reformed approach to practically every question of Theology will become more evident we hope in the subsequent chapters of this book which deal with his defense of the cardinal doctrines of the Confession. From this it will become evident that Machen not only speaks of divine sovereignty in the most exalting language,²⁴ but at times ascends to the most lofty theo-centric heights, when for example he describes the highest Christian desire as not being what he can get out of God, but for God Himself. God is valuable for His own sake and--"if we value God for His own sake, then the loss of other things will draw us all the closer to Him."²⁵ In another place he says, "At the very heart of the Christian religion is the hope of Heaven. That hope is not selfish, but it is the highest and noblest thought, because it involves not merely selfish enjoyment, but the glory of God. For the Glory of God realized through the creatures He has made, eternity will not be too long."²⁶ No wonder that his dying words were, "Isn't the Reformed Faith grand."²⁷ We trust that by this enough has been said to indicate that we regard Prof. Machen to have been distinctly a Reformed Apologist of the highest rank.

MACHEN DID NOT USE THE "EXPERIENCE" METHOD. By this we mean to say that Prof. Machen thought that the Christian religion is not based upon experience but upon facts of history. The contrary is decidedly the case. "There are many today who rebel against grounding of Christianity upon

20 Cf. v. ff.

21 Cf. p. 274.

22 Cf. idem, p. 274.

23 Cf. idem, p. 143 and *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 1936, p. 71 etc.

24 Cf. *The Christian View of Man*, 1937, p. 179, 225.

25 Cf. *What is Faith*, 1935, p. 71.

26 Idem, p. 221.

27 Cf. *The Presb. Guardian*, Jan. 23, 1937, p. 157.

historical facts. 'Let us have religion' they say, 'that shall be independent of historical science, that shall be able to continue no matter what historians may tell us about events that took place in Palestine in the first century of our era.' The Christian religion is very different, for it is based squarely upon events, it depends upon historical facts."²⁸ Machen emphatically rejects the view of those who say that theology "is merely the necessary changing expression of a unitary experience." Doctrine can, then, never be permanent, but is simply "the clothing of religious experience in the form of thought suitable to that particular generation,"--"or if theology is not even intended to be objectively true, if it is merely a convenient symbol in which in this generation an experience is clothed, the theologizing, it seems to me, is the most useless thing of trifling in which a man could possibly engage. Hence the modern depreciation of theology results logically in the most bottomless scepticism. It is not merely that the ancient creeds are criticised; the more serious thing is that the modern pragmatist, by the very nature of his philosophy, has nothing to put in their place. Theology according to him may be useful, but it can never be permanently true."²⁹ From this it is more than evident that Machen would not abandon theology for the symbolic expression of religious experience. When such is done, he says, two things are generally put in its place: Mysticism and Neo-positivism.

Machen was very strong in his denunciation of mysticism. He says, "Mysticism is unquestionably the natural result of the anti-intellectual tendency which now prevails; for mysticism is the consistent exaltation of experience at the expense of thought. But in actual fact mysticism is seldom consistent; indeed it cannot possibly be consistent if it seeks to explain itself to the world. The experience upon which it is based is said to be ineffable, yet mystics love to talk about that experience all the same."³⁰ Mysticism is also denounced severely when he says of the mystics, "the knowledge of God, they say, is the death of religion. Instead of seeking to know God, they tell us, we ought simply to feel Him; putting all theology aside, they say, we ought just to sink ourselves in the boundless ocean of God's being. Such is the attitude of the mystics, ancient and modern; but is not the attitude of the Christian. The Christian, unlike the mystic, knows Him whom he has believed."³¹

Machen also deplors the fact that many people, "for example, are taking human experience as their standard. They are saying that they will adhere to that kind of religion which works the best, which shows itself to be the

28 Bulletin 4, Aug. 1924, of the 4th. Biennial meeting of the conference of theol. seminaries and colleges, in the U.S. and Canada, art. "Faith and Knowledge," p. 12.

29 Cf. The Union Sem. Review, Jan. 1927, Art. "What is the Gospel."

30 Idem, p. 14.

31 Cf. "The Christian Faith in the Modern World," p. 117.

best in actual practice." In this connection the Bible is placed over against experience as the standard of truth and of life.³² The question here may be asked, has religious experience no value then, according to the theology of Machen? In reply to this we may use his own words: "One of the primary evidences for the truth of the Gospel record," he states, "is that evidence is found in Christian experience. Salvation does depend upon what happened long ago, but the event of long ago has effects that continue until today." -- "Christian experience, we have said, is useful as confirming the Gospel message. But because it is necessary, many men have jumped to the conclusion that it is all that is necessary."³³ This he claimed to be the error of Modernism.

But still there is an empirical tendency in the Apologetics of Machen in spite of all that which has been said. We must refer to his conception of the Christian religion. It is true that Machen often speaks of the Christian religion in a subjective sense. He speaks of religion as "the relation to God." This is not to be merely a means to an end, as though God is by it made useful only to help us out of trouble.³⁴ The amazing fact, however, remains, that Prof. Machen often identifies Religion with the objective revelation which is given us in the Bible. For example, the question is asked by Machen, whether we may "not return to the religion of Jesus Christ Himself, instead of to the apostles and letters for the Christian church." To this he replies, "the amazing thing about this objection which modernists raise, is the assumption as though it were something that would be accepted as a matter of course by evangelical Christians. That assumption is, that the words of Jesus, spoken, while He was on earth, are the sole norm of the Christian religion."³⁵ Here the "Religion of Jesus" is identified with "The words of Jesus." But the main material to which we would call your attention in establishing our contention that Prof. Machen often identifies religion and revelation is found in his "The Origin of Paul's Religion," 1936. From this whole book it is evident that the letters of the Apostle Paul in which we find the exalted doctrines concerning Christ are identified with Paul's religion. We do not deem it necessary at this point to substantiate this statement with a number of quotations from this book. A bit later we hope to give a brief summary of its contents, and that summary will make this more clear.

Dr. F. W. Grosheide states that during the last quarter century the "Experience-Theology" has waved its sceptre over the New Testament science, not only in Germany but also in the English-speaking countries. In connection with this he calls our attention to the fact that a Reformed

32 Cf. idem, p. 76.

33 Cf. Christianity and Liberalism, 1934, p. 70, 71.

34 Cf. The Chr. F. in the Mod. W., 1936, p. 8.

35 Cf. The Union Sem. Review, Jan. 1927, Art. "What is the Gospel," p. 165.

theologian in his otherwise excellent book, speaks in his title of Paul's religion.³⁶

In connection with this it is also interesting to observe what Prof. Machen has to say of the religion of Jesus. "Certainly Jesus had a religion of His own; His prayer was real prayer, His faith was real faith. His relation to His heavenly Father was not merely that of a child to a father; it was that of a man to his God. Certainly Jesus had a religion. -- But it is equally important to observe that the religion which Jesus had was not Christianity. Christianity is a way of getting rid of sin, and Jesus was without sin. His religion was a religion of Paradise, not a religion of sinful humanity. It was a religion to which we may perhaps in some sort attain in heaven, when the process of our purification is complete. -- The religion of Jesus was a religion of untroubled sonship; Christianity is a religion of the attainment of sonship by the redeeming work of Christ."³⁷ In this same connection we wish to quote what Machen says about Jesus not being a Christian. "According to a very wide-spread way of thinking, Jesus was the Founder of the Christian religion because He was the first to live the Christian life, in other words because He was Himself the first Christian. According to our view, on the other hand, Jesus stands in a far more fundamental and intimate relation to Christianity than that; He was, we hold, the Founder of our religion, not because He was the first Christian, but because He made Christianity possible by His redeeming work. -- Many persons hold up their hands in amazement at our assertion that Jesus was not a Christian, while we in turn regard it as the very height of blasphemy to say that He was a Christian. 'Christianity' to us, is a way of getting rid of sin; and therefore to say that Jesus was a Christian would be to deny His holiness."³⁸

MACHEN DID NOT USE THE RATIONALISTIC METHOD. Prof. Machen certainly did not make the ratio the norm for our religious life. We only need to refer the reader to his many unfavorable references to gnosticism.³⁹ In speaking of the resurrection of Jesus he definitely asserts that even though the evidences are certain and convincing, yet a conviction of sin on our part is necessary for our becoming convinced of it.⁴⁰ Machen does not deny that for humanity as it is now constituted, an intellectual conviction of the truth of Christianity is always accompanied by a change of heart and a new direction for the will. In order for Christianity to be recognized as true, the

36 "In den laatste kwarteeuw heeft op hed gebied van de Nieuw-testamentische werenschap de ervaringstheologie den schepter geswaaid, in elk geval den meesten invloed geoeffend. Dat geldt zeker van Duitschland, toch ook van den Angelsaksische landen. Sprak neit in Amerika zelfs een Gereformeerd theoloog in den titel van een overigens in menig opzicht uitnemend werk van Paulus' religie? De ervaringstheologie deed spreken van de religie der Bijbelschryver. (Cf. De Geschiedenis der N.T. Godsopenbaring, 1925, p. 8.)

37 Cf. Christianity and Liberalism, 1934, p. 91, 92.

38 Cf. What is Faith, 1935, p. 110.

39 Cf. for example, Christianity and Liberalism, 1934, p. 174, 178, etc.

40 Cf. What is Faith, 1935, p. 132, 133.

blinding effects of sin must be removed and this takes place at the new birth.⁴¹ But if the question is asked, which means does God use to bring about this conviction, then the answer is, logical evidences for the truth of Christianity. To quote Machen: "It is perfectly true, of course, that argument alone is quite insufficient to make a man a Christian. You may argue with him till the end of the world; you may bring forth the most magnificent arguments; but all will be in vain unless there be one other mysterious thing, -- the creative power of the Holy Spirit in the new birth. But because argument is insufficient, it does not follow that it is unnecessary. Sometimes it is used directly by the Holy Spirit to bring a man to Christ."⁴²

IN HIS APOLOGETICS MACHEN EMPHASIZED THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH. Concerning this we read: "Knowledge of God is regarded by the Bible to be the prerequisite of faith. We can trust God according to the Bible because He has revealed Himself as trustworthy. The knowledge that God has graciously given us of Himself is the basis of our confidence in him; the God of the Bible is one whom it is reasonable to trust."⁴³ Appeal is especially made to Heb. 11:3, where we read that "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" etc. The conclusion that is drawn from this text is that the doctrine of creation out of nothing is here expressed. From this creation we know certain things about God. "Certain things according to the Bible are known about God, and without these things there can be no faith."⁴⁴ This knowledge of God which we receive from natural theology is the basis of faith. "At the root, then, of faith in God, as taught in the Bible, is simply theism: the belief, namely, that the universe was created and is now upheld by a personal Being upon whom it is dependent but who is not dependent upon it. God is, indeed, according to this Christian view, immanent in the world, but He is also personally distinct from the world, and from the finite creatures that He has made. The transcendence of God--what the Bible calls the 'holiness' of God--is at the foundation of Christian faith. The Christian trusts God because God has been pleased to reveal Himself as one whom it is reasonable to trust; faith in God is based on knowledge."⁴⁵ It is then shown that this knowledge of God is partial. -- "Yet partial knowledge is not necessarily false; and the partial knowledge that we have of God, though it leaves vast mysteries unexplored, is yet sufficient as the basis of faith."⁴⁶ In his book "What is Faith," we are also told that in order to have Jesus as the object of our faith we must first know of Him. We place the most stupendous trust in Jesus when we commit to Him "the most precious

41 Cf. *What is Faith*, 1935, p. 134 ff.

42 Cf. *The Importance of Christian Scholarship*, address given at Bible League meetings in Westminster, London, June 17, 1932, p. 15.

43 *Idem*, p. 51.

44 Cf. *idem*, p. 51.

45 *Idem*, p. 65.

46 *Idem*, p. 66.

thing that we possess, -- our own immortal souls and the destinies of society. It is a stupendous act of trust. I can be justified only by an appeal to facts." But when the question is asked, "what then becomes of the childlike faith?" Machen answers by saying three things: 1. "In holding that knowledge is the basis of faith, we don't say that it necessarily precedes faith in the order of time." 2. Even the faith of a child is not independent of knowledge, since a child never can trust a person whom it holds in its mind to be untrustworthy. 2. When Jesus bade His disciples to receive the kingdom as a child He did not appeal to the ignorance of the child, but rather to its dependence. Machen then again comes to the conclusion "that faith in a Christian can be justified only by an appeal to fact."⁴⁷

The question now may be asked, which place is ascribed to the intellect when Machen speaks of the faith of a Christian? To quote his own words: "As over against this anti-intellectual tendency in the modern world, it will be one chief purpose of the present little book to defend the primacy of the intellect, and in particular to try to break down the false and disastrous opposition which has been set up between knowledge and faith."⁴⁸ In his comparison of true Christianity with mysticism, we read, "Religion, the mystic holds, in its pure form is independent of the intellect; when it is expressed in an intellectual mould it is cabined and confined; such expressions can be nothing more than symbolic; religious experience itself does not depend upon any kind of creed. In opposition to this mystical attitude the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews insists upon the primacy of the intellect; he bases religion squarely upon truth. He does not of course reject that immediate and mysterious contact of the soul with God which is dear to the mystic's heart; for that immediate contact of the soul with God is a vital part of all religion worthy of the name."⁴⁹ "To the pragmatist scepticism of the modern world, therefore, the Bible is sharply opposed; against the passionate anti-intellectualism of a large part of the modern church it maintains the primacy of the intellect; it teaches plainly that God has given to man a faculty of reason which is capable of apprehending truth, even truth of God."⁵⁰ Machen, however, also states, "that in order to exhibit the truth of Christianity at the bar of reason, it is necessary to learn the lesson of the law. It is impossible to prove first that Christianity is true, and then proceed on the basis of its truth to become conscious of one's sin; for the fact of sin is itself one of the chief foundations upon which the proof is based. When the fact of sin is recognized, and when to the recognition of it is added a fair scrutiny of the historical evidence, then it seems thoroughly reasonable to believe that Christianity is true. Anyone whose mind is clear, no matter what his personal attitude may be, will, we think,

47 Cf. *idem*, p. 91.

48 Cf. *What is Faith*, 1935, p. 26.

49 *Idem*, p. 49.

50 *Idem*, p. 51.

accept the truth of Christianity; but no one's mind is clear who denies the facts of his own soul: in order to come to the Christian view of Christ it is necessary only to be scientific; but no one can be truly scientific who ignores the fact of sin. We are not ignoring the emotional and volitional aspects of faith; we are not denying that as a matter of fact, in humanity as it is actually constituted, an intellectual conviction of the truth of Christianity is always accompanied by a change of heart and a new direction of the will. -- Regeneration, or the new birth, therefore does not stand in opposition to a truly scientific attitude toward evidence, but on the contrary it is necessary in order that that truly scientific attitude may be attained; it is not a substitute for the intellect, but on the contrary by it the intellect is made to be a trustworthy instrument for apprehending truth."⁵¹

In regard to the relationship between Religion and Science, Machen says, "It is highly misleading to say that religion and science are separate, and that the Bible is not intended to teach science. The assertion that the Bible does not intend to teach science contains an element of truth. It is certainly true that there are many departments of science into which the Bible does not enter. But such isolation is at the best provisional merely; and ultimately there ought to be a real synthesis of truth. On principle it can't be denied that the Bible teaches certain things about which also science has a right to speak." Machen then shows that this is especially true of history. "At the very center of the Bible are assertions about events in the external world in Palestine in the first century. -- These events of Palestine are just as much a proper subject for scientific history as events of Greece and Rome, and in an ideally complete scientific account of the physical universe, the emergence or non-emergence of Jesus' body from the tomb, -- a question upon which the existence of Christianity depends, -- would have to be recorded just as truly as the observations that are made in the laboratory. We must, therefore, reject the easy apologetic for Christianity which simply declares that religion and science belong in independent spheres."⁵² Machen then shows that the Christian religion is squarely based upon objective truths just as much as any other science. If Christianity is founded upon fact, then it is not entirely independent of science. The Christian religion is inter-related with other spheres of knowledge, and must seek to justify its place. "Faith need not be too humble or too apologetic before the bar of reason. Christian faith is a thoroughly reasonable thing."⁵³ "Theology, in other words, is just as much a science as is chemistry and is capable of advance. The two sciences, it is true, differ widely in their subject matter; they differ widely in the character of the evidence upon which their conclusions are based; in particular they differ widely in the qualifications required of the investigator; but they are

51 Cf. idem, p. 134, 135.

52 Idem, p. 242.

53 Cf. 241, 242.

both sciences, because they are both concerned with the acquisition and orderly arrangement of a body of truth."⁵⁴

From the above it is evident that according to Prof. Machen, theology is a science like any other science, such as history or chemistry. In this connection he shows that if theology is only a convenient symbol in which a mystic experience is clothed, it is no longer objective and therefore no science, because science always aims at the objective truth.

How did Machen regard the relationship between Religion and Philosophy? you ask. Machen emphatically asserts that philosophy and religion cannot be separated. Such a separation is unwarranted, because philosophy is of immense value for religion. He uses as example the question of the existence of God. "How then should the existence of such a God be established? The old answer to that question was, that it should be established by 'theistic proofs' in which an inference is drawn from the existence and character of the world to a personal creator and ruler. With these proofs must no doubt be included the 'moral argument' which infers from the presence of the moral law in the conscience of man the existence of a great lawgiver. Now evidently the consideration of these proofs belong to philosophy. If this does not belong to it, nothing does. Philosophy if it be philosophy at all, must at least consider the question whether the universe is to be explained ultimately by the existence of a personal God. It is true, that knowledge of God has been obscured. -- But the fault does not lie in philosophy but in the philosophers; the evidence for the existence of a personal God was spread out before us all the time."⁵⁵

We are then told that man fails to see this because of sin, but the effect of sin is removed by Christ. "But," so he continues, "that does not mean that He causes us to relinquish the theistic proofs which were open to us even in our unredeemed state, or that He causes us to despise that measure of understanding these proofs which through common grace was attained even by unregenerated men. What it does mean is that we are enabled through the redemption offered by Christ to see clearly where formerly our eyes were darkened. The experience of religion does not absolve us from being philosophers, but it makes us better philosophers. And as far as the intellectual defence of Christianity is concerned, the fact should never be obscured that theism is the logical prius of faith in Christ. 'Believe in God,' says Jesus, 'believe also in me.' To reverse that order is to throw the entire Apologetics out of joint. The old order of Apologetics is correct: first there is a God; second, it is likely that He should reveal Himself; third, He has actually revealed Himself in Christ. It is a very serious fault when the last of

54 Idem, p. 33.

55 Cf. Pr. Theol. Rev. 1926, Art. "Religion, Science and Philosophy," p. 55.

the three points is put first."⁵⁶

Our author then asks the question, "Is Christianity dependent upon a sound metaphysic in the ordinary proper meaning of the phrase?" His reply is "a decided affirmative." -- "Christianity does depend, we hold, upon a sound metaphysic." But this fact should not discourage us, for a sound metaphysic can be attained. "It may be attained wherever philosophers see clear, and philosophers come to see clear when their minds are illuminated by the Holy Spirit."⁵⁷ Machen then shows that religion is of course far more than science or philosophy. "A man might conceivably hold a perfectly correct view of God and of Christ, -- he might attain a complete intellectual acceptance of the facts, that are at the basis of our religion, and at the same time not be a religious or a Christian man. Religion is not merely intellectual. But although religion is not merely intellectual, it is intellectual." -- "No man was ever brought to Christian conviction only by argument, but because argument is insufficient, it does not follow that it is unnecessary. It is often an instrument that the sovereign Spirit of God is pleased to use. What the new birth does is not to absolve men from being scientific in their defence of the faith, but rather to enable them to be truly scientific because a veil has been taken from their eyes. -- Such knowledge of new facts which Christians alone have does not absolve us from a consideration of other facts which are known to non-Christian men. On the contrary, the truth can be attained only by a consideration of all the facts. We ought, therefore, not to despise either science or philosophy; we ought not to hold that the arguments even of non-Christian men are without importance for the defence of the Christian religion. We ought to try to lead scientists and philosophers to become Christians, not by asking them to regard science and philosophy as without bearing upon religion, but on the contrary, by asking them to become more scientific and more philosophic through attention of all instead of some of the facts. We are pleading in other words for a truly, comprehensive Apologetics, which does not neglect the theistic proofs (for the existence of God) or the historical evidence of the New Testament account of Jesus, but which also does not neglect the facts of the inner life of man. The force of such an Apologetics is, we think, culmative [*sic*; probably "culminative"]; such an Apologetics is strong in its details, but it is even stronger because its details are embraced in a harmonious whole."⁵⁸ In this same connection Machen argues against Dr. Mullins of Louisville, -- "But in the separation which in other words he (Mullins) sets up between science and philosophy and religion, he has introduced, we think, an inconsistent element that mars the symmetry and stability of the apologetic edifice."⁵⁹

56 Idem, p. 56 ff.

57 Idem, p. 60.

58 Cf. Pr. Theol. Rev. 1926, p. 55 ff. Art. "Religion, Science and Philosophy."

59 Idem, p. 65.

"The evidences for the truth of Christianity are varied and can't all be reduced to measurements. The Gospel witness to Jesus, for example, is wonderfully convincing when one brings it into connection with the facts of the soul. The witness is confirmed by present experience. The Christian knows the one in whom he has believed. It is one of the root errors of the present day to suppose that because the philosophical and historical foundations of our religion are insufficient to produce faith, they are therefore unnecessary. The truth is that their insufficiency is due not at all to any weakness of their own but only to a weakness in our minds. The facts of the Christian religion remain facts, no matter whether we cherish them or not; they are facts for God, they are facts both for angels and demons, they are facts now and will remain facts beyond the end of time. But the facts are one thing and the recognition of the facts are another, and that is dependent for us upon the sense of need." This need according to Prof. Machen, is to feel the burden of sin.⁶⁰

MACHEN'S APPEAL TO A "THREE-FOLD REVELATION OF GOD" IN HIS APOLOGETICS. First of all, it is well to observe that distinction is made between Natural and Supernatural Revelation. By this, it is evident, Machen refers to General and Special Revelation. But he almost without exception designates this distinction with the terms "Natural" and "Supernatural." By "Natural" Revelation Machen means that God "revealed Himself through nature," and by "Supernatural" Revelation we are not speaking about something contrary to nature. -- But when we say that anything is "supernatural" we are saying that it is "above nature."

In the book, "What is Faith," the question is proposed, "How may we attain to this knowledge of God which is necessary to faith, how may we become acquainted with Him?"⁶¹ His answer is that he follows the "old, old ways." Machen then speaks of a three-fold revelation of God. God reveals Himself to us (1) in NATURE, (2) in our CONSCIENCE, and (3) in the BIBLE.

First of all, we may know God by "the contemplation of His work in Nature. 'The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhead.' 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handwork.' By some men, indeed, the glory is unperceived. -- God pity them -- the poor blind souls. But when the eyes of our soul are opened, then as we stand before a great mountain range we shall say, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence shall my help come?'; in the fury of the storm we shall think of Him who did fly upon the wings of the

60 Cf. "What is Faith," 1935, p. 243 ff.

61 Cf. p. 75 - It is evident from the context here that Machen is not speaking of the saving knowledge of God, but rather the knowledge "necessary to faith."

wind; and the flowers of the field will reveal to us the weaving of God and even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as these."⁶² In connection with this revelation in nature, he says, "Modern men of science, if they be thoughtful, admit that there is a mystery in the presence of which the wisdom of the wisest man is dumb; the true man of science stands at length before a curtain that is never lifted, a mystery that rebukes all pride. But the revelation in nature is far richer than the men of science suppose; in reality it represents to us not merely a blank mystery, but the mighty God. The revelation comes to different men in different ways. When I viewed for example, the spectacle of the total eclipse of the sun at New Haven, on Jan. 24, 1925, I was confirmed in my theism."⁶³

Machen asserts that underlying all Jesus' teaching "and all His example is the stupendous recognition that God is the maker and ruler of the world; and the Bible from beginning to end depends upon the same 'philosophy' of a personal God. That philosophy ought to have been clear from an examination of the universe as it is; the maker is revealed by the things He has made."⁶⁴ -- Natural religion, has, therefore, the full sanction of the Bible; and at the foundation of every theological course should be philosophic apologetics, including the proofs of the existence of a personal God, creator and ruler of the world. -- The existence of a personal God should have been clear to us from the world as it is, but that revelation of God in nature has been obscured by sin, and to discover it and confirm it we need the blessed supernatural revelation that the Scripture contains."⁶⁵ In his "Christian Faith in the Modern World," 1937, Machen speaks of creation as a proof for the existence of a personal God. "It has been defended by philosophers and theologians by way of detailed reasoning. That reasoning has been divided logically into what are called the 'theistic Proofs' -- indications in the world itself that point to the existence of a personal God, creator and ruler of the world. I am not going to speak of them here except just to say that I think they are good proofs, and that the Christian man, whether he has a detailed knowledge of them or not, ought never to depreciate them or regard as a matter of no importance the debate about them among philosophers and learned men."⁶⁶ "If God has revealed Himself through the things that He has made, why do so very few men listen to the revelation? The plain fact is that very few men arrive by a contemplation of nature at a true belief in a personal God. -- Why is that so? -- there are two possible explanations of the fact. One is that there is nothing there to see. The other is that the men who do not see are blind. It is this latter explanation which the Bible

62 Cf. idem, p. 75, 76.

63 Cf. Woman's Home Companion, Dec. 1925, p. 15, art. "My Idea of God."

64 Machen then quotes Ps. 19:1, and Rom. 1:20.

65 Cf. The Importance of Christian Scholarship -- address given at Bible League meeting in Westminster, London, June 17, 1932, p. 35 ff.

66 P. 15, 16.

gives of the failure of men to know God through the things that He has made. The Bible puts it very plainly in that same passage already quoted from the first chapter of Romans. 'Their foolish heart,' says Paul, 'was darkened.' Hence they did not see. The fault did not lie in nature. Men were 'without excuse,' Paul says, 'when they did not see what nature had to show. Their minds were blinded by sin.'"⁶⁷

In speaking of "Natural Theology" in "What is Faith," 1935, Prof. Machen uses even stronger language than that which was just quoted. Referring to the text in Hebrews, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear," he comments: "Here we have expressed with a clearness that leaves nothing to be desired, the doctrine of creation out of nothing, and that doctrine is said to be received by faith. It is the same doctrine that appears in the first verse of the Bible, 'In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth,' and that really is presupposed in the Bible from beginning to end. -- The truth is that in the Epistle to the Hebrews as well as in the rest of the Bible we are living in a world of thought that is diametrically opposed to the anti-intellectualism of the present day. Certain things according to the Bible are known about God, and without these things there can be no faith. To the pragmatist scepticism of the modern religious world, therefore, the Bible is sharply opposed; against the passionate anti-intellectualism of a large part of the modern church it maintains the primacy of the intellect; it teaches plainly that God has given to man a faculty of reason which is capable of apprehending truth, even truth about God. That does not mean that we finite creatures can find out God by our searching; but it does mean that God has made us capable of receiving the information which He chooses to give. -- So our reason is certainly insufficient to tell us about God unless He reveals Himself; but it is capable (or would be capable if it were not clouded by sin) of receiving revelation when once it is given. God's revelation of Himself to man embraces, indeed, only a small part of His being; the area of what we know is infinitesimal compared with the area of what we do not know. But partial knowledge is not necessarily false knowledge; and our knowledge of God on the basis of His revelation of Himself is, we hold, true as far as it goes."⁶⁸

In the second place, God reveals Himself in the voice within us, or our conscience. "The contemplation of the universe of which we have just spoken, brings us to the very brink of infinity; the world is too vast for us, and all around it is enveloped by an impenetrable mystery. But there is also an infinity within. It is revealed in the voice of conscience. In the sense of guilt there is something that is removed from all relativity; we stand there

67 Cf. Christian Faith in the Modern World, 1936, p. 21, 22.

68 P. 51, 52.

face to face with the absolute. True, in the humdrum of life we often forget; but the strange experiences come ever again. It may be in the reading or witnessing of a great drama; the great tragedies, in the world's literature, are those that pull aside the curtain of the common-place and make us feel anew the stark irrevocableness of guilt. It may also be, alas, in the contemplation of our lives. But however conscience speaks, it is the voice of God. The law reveals a lawgiver: and the character of the law reveals the Lawgiver's awful righteousness."⁶⁹

We are also told that God speaks to all men through the voice of conscience, because He has planted His laws in the hearts. "He speaks through the majesty of the moral law. A law implies a lawgiver. Conscience testifies of God. -- The Bible sets the stamp of its approval upon that revelation of God through conscience, as we have seen that it sets the stamp of its approval upon the revelation that comes through the external world. Paul says for example, -- 'For when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.' Here the Apostle does seem clearly to teach that the voice of conscience, which speaks in the very constitution of man's nature, is the voice of God. He does not mean that men really obey that law as it ought to be obeyed. On the contrary, he is very clear indeed in teaching that all have disobeyed. They have disobeyed the law, but at least the law is there in their hearts. Because of their disobedience they are under the condemnation of the law; the law can therefore of itself never give them any hope. But that is not the fault of the law; the moral law is written in the very constitution of their being, and if they do not heed it they are without excuse. Thus God, the great lawgiver, is revealed in the voice of conscience as He is in the wonders of the world without. These two may be grouped together as constituting the revelation of God through nature, if nature is taken to include the nature of man."⁷⁰ "The wonders of the universe without and the moral law within, -- those are the two great elements in God's revelation of Himself through nature."⁷¹ -- "The philosopher Immanuel Kant is said to have summed it up when he spoke of the starry heavens above and the moral law within as being the two things which fill the heart of man with awe. I do not mean those two things gave to Immanuel Kant a true knowledge of God: I do not mean even that he had a true notion of what knowledge itself is. But what I mean is that he made a correct summary of those things which apart from the Bible ought to give us a knowledge of God."⁷²

69 Cf. *What is Faith*, 1935, p. 76, 77.

70 *Idem*, p. 26.

71 Cf. *Christian Faith in the Modern World*, 1936, p. 25, 26.

72 *Idem*, p. 26.

In the third place, God reveals Himself through the Bible. This is an entirely different way. This revelation of God through the Bible is different from the other because it is not natural but supernatural. By "supernatural," Machen, however, does not mean something contrary to nature, because God who is the author of nature cannot contradict Himself. But by it he means, "above nature."⁷³ By this is not meant that nature exists apart from God. "But what we mean is that God acts and speaks in two different ways. In the first place He acts and speaks by means of the world that He has made, and in the second place He acts and speaks directly, without the use of means. It was in that latter way that God acted when He first created the world, and it was in that latter way that He acted when He wrought the miracles recorded in the Bible and when He spoke to men in the supernatural revelation with which we are dealing now."⁷⁴

We are then told that this supernatural revelation was needed for two reasons: 1. Because God's revelation of Himself has been hidden from our eyes by our sin. God's natural revelation of Himself in the external world wherein His glory is manifest, as well as God's internal revelation through His voice within, -- our conscience, are both hidden from man's eyes because of sin. Conscience is blunted, and the voice of conscience is silenced by a life of sin. 2. But this supernatural revelation is also necessary to tell us of His grace. "He has told us of the way in which sinners who have offended against His holy law and deserve nothing but His wrath have been made His children at infinite cost and will live as His children forever. Where shall we find that supernatural revelation? I want to say very plainly that I think all that we can know of it now is found in the pages of one Book."⁷⁵ We are then told by Machen that this supernatural revelation came to a close when the last Bible book was written. "Supernatural revelation, along with miracles, ceased when the last of the Apostles of Jesus died."

THE DOCTRINE OF "PLENARY" INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES IS ACCEPTED BY MACHEN. According to his own definition, it is that "The writers of the Bible books . . . received a blessed and wonderful and supernatural guidance and impulsion by the Spirit of God, so that they were preserved from the errors that appear in other books and thus the resulting book, the Bible, is in all its parts the very Word of God, completely true in what it says in matters of fact and completely authoritative in its commands. This is the great doctrine of the full or 'plenary' inspiration of the Holy Scriptures."⁷⁶ In this connection it is made very clear that "the

73 Cf. idem, p. 26.

74 Cf. idem, p. 26, 27.

75 Cf. idem, p. 28, 29.

76 Cf. Christian Faith in the Modern World, 1936, p. 45.

writers of the Biblical books, as distinguished from the scribes who later copied the books, were inspired. Only the autographs of the Biblical books, in other words . . . the books as they came from the pen of the sacred writers, and not any one of the copies of those autographs which we now possess . . . were produced with that supernatural impulsion and guidance of the Holy Spirit which we call inspiration."⁷⁷ We also read, "I certainly believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. . . . But if you mean by 'verbal inspiration' the view that inspiration has to do only with the words of the Bible and not also with the souls of the Biblical writers, then I want to tell you that I do not believe in verbal inspiration in that sense."⁷⁸ Thus the so-called mechanical theory is rejected.

Machen believed that this doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures should be defended. "I believe in the reasoned defence of the inspiration of the Bible. Sometimes it is immediately useful in bringing a man to Christ. It is graciously used by the Spirit of God to that end. -- But its chief use is in enabling Christian people to answer the legitimate questions, not of vigorous opponents of Christianity, but of people who are seeking the truth and are troubled by hostile voices that are heard on every hand."⁷⁹

We believe that a defense of the infallibility of the Bible, that is not altogether free from rationalization can be found in Machen's explanation of the Star of [the] East, in the infancy narrative of Matthew. "Does the narrative really mean that the star literally went before men as they walked upon the earth; does it really mean that it pointed out to them the house in which Mary and the child were found? The answer is by no means so certain as is sometimes assumed. -- It is quite possible, in perfect loyalty to the meaning of the narrative, to regard the star of the magi as being merely a natural phenomenon, a conjunction or a comet or a new star, which the magi interpreted by the principles of their art as referring to the Messianic king. This interpretation is admirably in accord with the account of what happened in Jerusalem. The narrator seems at that point to have no thought that the star might have been a guide to direct them to the exact spot where the child was born. On the contrary they had to enquire their way; and it was only on the basis of Messianic prophecy, interpreted by experts, that they started out for Bethlehem.

When they started out they saw the star again; and seeing it, they rejoiced. Then it 'went before them until it came and stood over the place where the young child was.'

It is these words alone which give any serious difficulty to the natural, as

⁷⁷ Cf. *idem*, p. 39.

⁷⁸ *Idem*, p. 47, 48.

⁷⁹ Cf. *idem*, p. 63.

distinguished from the supernatural, way of interpreting what is said about the star. How could the star 'go before' them, how could it stand over a particular place, if it was a natural phenomenon in the heavens? Do not these words clearly indicate that the narrator conceives of the star as a phenomenon near to the earth, and thus, to use our modern terminology, as clearly supernatural?

Plausible though such considerations are, we do not think that they are at all decisive. They fail to take account of the poetical, oriental way of describing events that we should describe in very different terms. Do Matthew's words mean more than that when the magi started out by night upon their journey to Bethlehem, they were cheered on their way by the star which shone down upon them from the heavens? Does the narrator intend to do more than picture for us the last stage of the long journey and describe for us the joy that filled the magi's hearts?"⁸⁰

Prof. Machen anticipates the charge of "inconsistency" since he was very severe upon the rationalizers, who regarded the narratives as historical, but explained the miracles away; "and now here we are proposing a natural interpretation which shall make the story of the magi more palatable to modern men!" Machen then states that with this figurative interpretation which is common, especially in oriental books, he disclaims to be conscious "of any apologetic bias," for the reason, that if his interpretation should be wrong and the literal right -- "we should still have no objection of principle against regarding the narrative as true. When once we have accepted the entrance of the supernatural in connection with the appearance of Jesus in the world, we are no longer interested in setting exact limits to the extent to which the supernatural is to be found."⁸¹

With all respect for Prof. Machen as a Reformed scholar, we cannot suppress the thought that in this case he himself indulges in that which he so severely criticizes in others, even though it be in a different manner and with an entirely different purpose.

The definition that we find of the miracle is: "A miracle is an event in the external world that is wrought by the immediate power of God."⁸² At another place he speaks of the miracle as involving "an intrusion of the creative power of God into the course of the world."⁸³ The miracle is also designated as something supernatural. By supernatural is meant, "such an act of God, independent of the course of nature."⁸⁴ This is not understood

80 Cf. *Virgin Birth*, 1930, p. 224 ff.

81 Cf. *idem*, p. 226, 227.

82 Cf. *The Christian View of Man*, 1936, p. 117.

83 Cf. *What is Faith*, 1935, p. 134.

84 Cf. *The Christian View of Man*, 1936, p. 114, 115.

as being contrary to nature, but "above nature." This is defended by stating, "The possibility of supernatural acts of God, entering into the course of nature, cannot be denied by anyone who really believes in God's initial act of creation. All supernatural acts of God recorded in the Bible are of two kinds: the supernatural acts in the external world, and the supernatural acts within the soul of man."⁸⁵ Machen then limits the miracle to the supernatural acts in the external world. "Those that are in the former class, those that are events in the external world, are properly called miracles."⁸⁶

In the miracle God chooses to bring "his counsels to pass" in a way "that is independent of nature."⁸⁷ The reason Machen assigned for the performance of miracles is "for the most part, let us say, to be very cautious -- to the fact of sin."⁸⁸ "Miracles today have ceased."⁸⁹ We are also told that the extraordinary recovery of a sick one is not a miracle, but in it God only uses "the resources of nature for the recovery of our loved one."⁹⁰ "Such an ordering of the resources of nature by God is not a miracle; and I repeat what I have already said, that in our day miracles have ceased."⁹¹ "But though miracles have ceased⁹² certain other supernatural acts of God are wrought every day, when men and women are born again by the mysterious creative work of the Holy Spirit that the Bible calls the new birth."⁹³

In his different books and articles Machen shows that the modern theologians have used various methods to get rid of the miracle in the Bible. These have already been referred to in the previous chapter. Machen's life was devoted to the defense of the miraculous element in the Bible and to refute the attack upon the miracle by the modernist. He does this by sharp argumentation:

1. By showing that the miracles do not destroy the basis of science.⁹⁴ In this connection he shows that they are possible, "because this is indissolubly joined with 'theism.' Once admit the existence of a personal God, Maker and Ruler of the world, and no limits, temporal or otherwise, can be set to the creative power of such a God. Admit that God once created the world and you cannot deny that He might engage in creation

85 Cf. idem, p. 115.

86 Cf. idem, p. 115, 116.

87 Cf. idem, p. 124.

88 Idem, p. 124.

89 Idem, p. 124.

90 Idem, p. 125.

91 Idem, p. 125.

92 Idem, p. 127.

93 Idem, p. 128.

94 Cf. Liberalism and Christianity, 1934, p. 101 f.

again. -- It may be admitted that miracles conceivably might occur.⁹⁵

2. The actuality of the miracle is also argued from the importance of the miracle. In this connection we are told that the miracle is an "aid to faith." . . . "Yet if Jesus were merely a man like the rest of men, then an ideal is all that we have in Him. Far more is needed by a sinful world. It is small comfort to be told that there was goodness in the world, when what we need is goodness triumphant over sin. But goodness triumphant over sin involves an entrance of the creative power of God, and that creative power of God is manifested in the miracles. . . . Without the miracles we should have a teacher; with the miracles we have a Saviour."⁹⁶

3. "The evidence for the miracles of the New Testament is supported in yet another way; it is supported by the existence of an adequate occasion. . . . The acceptance of a complex is made vastly easier when an adequate reason can be detected for the complex as a whole. . . . It is found in the conquest of sin. . . . Mankind is under the curse of God's holy law, and the dreadful penalty includes the corruption of our whole nature. . . . On the basis of that view . . . it is obvious that nothing natural will meet our need. . . . Hope is to be sought only in a creative acts of God."⁹⁷

4. The evidence for the miracle is strengthened when we observe that the miracle exactly fits in with the character of Jesus. "The issue does not concern individual miracles, even so important as the miracle of the Virgin Birth. It really concerns all miracles. And the question concerning all miracles is simply the question of the acceptance or rejection of the Saviour which the New Testament presents. Reject the miracles and you have in Jesus the fairest flower of humanity, who made such an impression upon His followers that after His death they could not believe that He had perished but experienced hallucinations in which they thought they saw Him risen from the dead; accept the miracles and you have a Saviour who came voluntarily into the world for our salvation, suffered for our sins upon the cross, rose again from the dead by the power of God and ever lives to make intercession for us. The difference between these two views is the difference between two totally diverse religions."

5. Finally the evidence for the miracle is supported by historical evidences. "The trouble is that the miracles are found not to be an excrescence in the New Testament account of Jesus, but belong to the very warp and woof. They are ultimately connected with Jesus' lofty claims; they stand or fall with the undoubted purity of His character; they reveal the very nature of His mission in the world." Here it is shown that Jesus claimed to be the

95 Idem, p. 102.

96 Cf. idem, p. 103 f.

97 Idem, p. 103 f.

supernatural Messiah that should come into the world. If the supernatural in Jesus is rejected, then His character is no longer pure and He can no longer be taken as an example for our faith. Thus by a series of keen argumentation Machen seeks to establish the evidence for the existence of the miracle.