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WRESTLING WITH THE GOD-CONCEPT

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A NOVEL and striking contribution to the labors of a modern philosophical wrestling with the concept of God has been made by Dr. Henry Nelson Wieman, Professor of the Philosophy of Religion in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. From his two books, *Religious Experience and Scientific Method*, and *The Wrestle of Religion with Truth*, Dr. Morrison, Editor of *The Christian Century*, confessed that he derived "a feeling that in their author a new star of the first magnitude has arisen in the religious firmament;" and "I am going to watch eagerly for every word this scholar writes. For I cannot help believing that his writing on the psychology or the philosophy or the science—which shall I call it?—of religion will be the most important contribution to the faith which we shall see in the next decade." Here is a new, loudly heralded approach, one of a score that is just now receiving wide attention. Last May Dr. Wieman was one of the principal speakers during the Anniversary Week of the Unitarian Laymen's League at Boston, his topic being "A Workable Idea of God." This address presents in clear, summary form Dr. Wieman's concept of God; on this address exclusively the following paragraphs offer a brief commentary.¹ Dr.

¹ This article quotes from the address as printed in *The Christian Register*, Boston, June 20 and 27, 1929.

Wieman is hereafter frequently referred to as the speaker.

Dr. Wieman is above all a strong advocate of belief in God, but he at once rules out two of three possible ways in which this belief may be present in us. The first way is to believe in the existence of God and do nothing about it. The second way is to accept God and enjoy Him by tender, soothing, inner experiences, and to rest content with these. This belief is only subjectively useful. The third method of belief in God, the one advocated by the speaker, consists in utilizing belief in God as an instrument of research for God Himself. "According to this method, one uses his belief in God as a stimulus and guide to search out that process which is operating in the objective world, open to observation and experimentation, which works in such a way as to actualize the supreme possibilities of value which reside in this world. This process, which works in this way, is God." This, then, is the workable idea in a nutshell. It contains the startling statement that God is a world-process, but have we not misunderstood by taking it literally? Over and over again we are told that God is a *process* operating in the objective world, and hence, in some way, identified with the world. Is this perhaps meant to be our familiar *concursum*? At times we imagine that is what the speaker intends to convey. "God is that tendency of the universe, social and