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Christianity
and Evolution



Reflections on
Science and Religion

PANTHEISM AND CHRISTIANITY

IN this note I want to try to bring face to face two great religious powers: the only two powers, truth to say, that today share between them the world of human thought. They are Christianity and pantheism.

Generally speaking (when it is a Christian who is responsible for the confrontation) the chief concern is to emphasize the opposition between the two doctrines and to widen still further the gulf that divides them.

My approach in this essay will be the exact reverse. What I am proposing to do is to narrow that gap between pantheism and Christianity by bringing out what one might call the Christian soul of pantheism or the pantheist aspect of Christianity. My personal conviction is that it is with pantheism as it is with all the other isms (evolutionism, socialism, feminism, internationalism, modernism . . .). The designation of these words is, quite unwarrantably, restricted to certain particular, infelicitous and unacceptable, expressions of tendencies which, taken in their whole content, are legitimate; some day, there can be no doubt, they must be put in terms whose truth will be universally recognized. Pantheism has become synonymous with Spinozism, Hegelianism, theosophy, monism . . . I believe that this identification is false, unjustified and dangerous. Beneath the heterodox forms of the pantheist impulse just mentioned, there lie a psychological reality and an intellectual need which are much vaster and more enduring than any system of Hindu, Greek or German thought.

To put it briefly, my precise aim is as follows: I would like to make it clear that pantheism (in the current, restricted meaning of the word) is only the defective form in which is expressed

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a well-justified (and, moreover, ineradicable) tendency in the human soul, a tendency which can be fully satisfied only in Christianity.

This tendency is to recognize the *importance, in one's religious calculations, of the Whole*. In Part One I shall give a summary of its historical development, before considering, in Part Two, in what way it may be Christianized.

I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PANTHEIST TENDENCY

a. This feeling of the importance of the Whole has its roots in the furthest and most secret depths of our being. As a matter of intellectual necessity – as an affective need – and, maybe, by the direct impact made on us by the universe, we are constantly and essentially brought back to a consideration of the world, apprehended in its totality.

Initially, our intelligence is baffled by the multiple, by the plural. We are unable, in reality, to understand the multiple. We can comprehend beings only in so far as they can so escape from plurality as to be capable of action or reaction, of harmonization or association. For thought, the multiple (matter) is something without legitimate existence. The intelligible world, the true world, can only be a unified world. In consequence, the elements, the parts, the atoms, the monads, have no real and permanent value. Ultimately, the only thing that has any importance is the Whole, in which alone unity can be effected.

Parallel with (and in a sense identical with) our intellectual need of unity, we experience, deep within us, an affective and spontaneous need for union. Man is not drawn towards the One (that is, the Whole) by his reason alone, but by the full force of his whole being (is not our thought the act of our whole being?). On earth we are essentially separate, incomplete