

PANENTHEISM: ALL-IN-GOD

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SALIENT POINTS OF AN ADDRESS

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GOD AND I

I walked with God, God walked with me,
But which was God, and which was me?
And thus I found, the Truth profound,
I live in God, God lives with me.

- Anon.

The term *panentheism* (from Greek: *πάν* ('*pan*') = all, *en* = in, and *theos* = God; "all-in-God") is the theological position that God, the ground of and for all being, is not only immanent within the universe *but also* transcends the universe, in such a way that not only is God *in* all things *but also* all things are also *in* God, but *not* such that all things are God.

Panentheism is essentially a combination or conciliation of traditional theism (God is the supreme being) and pantheism (God is everything). Panentheism is not, however, the same thing as pantheism. Pantheism holds that God is *synonymous* with the material universe or nature, whereas panentheism holds that God *includes* the universe. However, panentheism agrees with pantheism that God includes nature as a part of its being. In the words of William Blake, "To see a World in a Grain of Sand, or Heaven in a Wild Flower, Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand, and Eternity in an hour."

Panentheism has a number of advantages over both pantheism and traditional theism. The *Encyclopedia Americana* rightly states, "Both atheists and theists object to pantheism." Panentheism provides an all-encompassing, growing, "processing" God, everywhere present and containing everywhere within Itself as well as preserving the exercise of freewill and the ability of human beings to be, in effect, co-creators with God in a process that Rabbi David A Cooper (*God is a Verb*) calls "god-ing".

Panentheism overcomes two primary reasons for the rejection of traditional theism - firstly, the unacceptability to most thinking people of an anthropomorphic personal creator god, and, secondly, the problem of gratuitous evil, insofar as this problem has been created by the assumption that the term "God" refers to a being who could prevent but otherwise chooses to permit such evils. Also relevant to the problem of evil is panentheism's rejection of divine inertia in favour of the idea that God suffers with *and as part of* the world's suffering.

The German idealistic philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832), seeking to reconcile monotheism and pantheism, coined the term panentheism (all in God) in 1828, although aspects of panentheism can be traced all of the way back to Plato, and the term is closely associated with the Logos of Greek philosophy in the works of Herakleitos, which pervades the cosmos and whereby all things were made. Krause held that all existence is one great unity, which he called *Wesen* (Essence). This Essence is said to be God, and includes within Itself the

finite unities of man, reason and nature. God therefore includes the world in Itself but also extends beyond it.

Fuller elaborations of panentheistic beliefs can be found in the development of German Idealism in the 19th century, particularly in the work of Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling, and in the development of process theology (see below) in the 20th century. A panentheistic conception of God also influenced New England transcendentalists such as the Unitarian and Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. The term was popularized by Charles Hartshorne in his development (beginning in the 1940s) of what has come to be known as “process theology”. According to this school of theology, the only absolute in the world is change. Thus, even God is said to be in constantly changing. Further, in our living we create content not only in ourselves *but also in God*. A panentheistic view of God has also been adopted by proponents of various New Thought beliefs.

Panentheistic views of God can be found in many of the world’s great religions including Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and even Christianity. This may surprise some, but one can find plenty of support for panentheism in *The Holy Bible*, both in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament of the Christian Scriptures) and in the New Testament. Take, for example, the following:

Where could I go to escape your spirit?
Where could I flee from your presence?
If I climb the heavens, you are there,
there too, if I lie in Sheol.
If I flew to the point of sunrise, or westward across the sea
your hand would still be guiding me, your right hand holding me.
—Ps. 139.7-10

We could say much more and still fall short; to put it concisely, "He is all."
—Sir. 43.27

Do I not fill heaven and earth? It is Yahweh who speaks. —Jer. 23.24

Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. —Jn. 1.2-5

I and the father are one. – Jn. 10.30

... I am in the Father: and you in me, and I in you. – Jn. 14.20

In him we live, and move, and have our being.... "We are his offspring." —Acts 17.28 NIV

For from him, and through him and to him are all things. —Rm. 8.36 NIV

... that God may be all in all. – I Cor. 15:28.

There is one God who is father of all, over all, through all and within all. —Eph. 4.6

God is love, and anyone who lives in love, lives in God, and God in him. —I Jn. 4.16

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. —I Jn. 1.5

Fr Charles Cummings, a Trappist-Cistercian monk, author of *Eco-Spirituality: Toward a Reverent Life*, writes:

Pantheism exaggerates divine immanence to the point of identifying God and the universe. The Judeo-Christian tradition maintains both that God is immanently in all things (or all things are in God) and the God is transcendentally beyond all things.

Cummings also writes:

Reverence for nature is not irreverence for God; reverence for nature does not diminish our reverence toward God. God need not compete with nature for our reverence. Rather, we can reverence God by reverencing nature, because all creation is permeated with God's presence.

Similarly, Matthew Fox, author of *Original Blessing* and many other bestsellers, has found value in a panentheistic approach. He writes:

The pantheism that regards the totality of Nature as being God (i.e., that God is swallowed up in the unity of all) rather than an aspect of divinity is quite distinct from monotheistic pantheism. This monotheistic pantheism conceptualizes God as the all-inclusive essence or substance, the first cause of the universe, with many attributes, including intelligence, which we can perceive in Nature's lawful harmony. This form of pantheism would be better termed panentheism.

Fox also states, "Panentheism teaches that all things are in God, God in all things, and God works through all things."

The following New Thought affirmations encapsulate and propound a panentheistic view of God and life:

AFFIRMATIONS

I believe in One Power - The Power of God.
I believe in Fulness of Life - The Life of God.
I believe in the Presence of Beauty - The Beauty of God.
I believe in One Spirit - The Spirit of God.
I believe in the Presence of Joy - The Joy of God.
I believe in Goodwill to All - The Will of God.
I believe in Universal Peace - The Peace of God.
I believe in Freedom for every Soul - The Freedom of God.
I believe in a pure, sweet, radiant, permeating, enfolding and all-embracing mighty Love -
The Love of God "Which was, IS NOW, and ever shall be," in whom I live, move, and have
my being, now and evermore.

- Emilie A. Hulett, *adapted*.

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