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## The Divine Immanence.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR JAMES ORR, D.D.

THE immanence of God is one of the watchwords of what is called the New Theology, one which is supposed to furnish the means for an entire reconstruction of theology, and resetting of such Christian doctrines as the Incarnation and Atonement. It is a phrase which expresses a deep truth, but which is, at the same time, used to cover a vast amount of confusion of thought and positive error. It is worth while, therefore, bestowing a little attention on it.

Rightly apprehended, the immanence of God expresses a truth, and is a needed protest against an error. The truth it expresses is that God's world does not and cannot exist apart from God Himself, its creative Cause and sustaining Power. It has not an existence independent of God. Scripture expresses this idea when it says: "In Him we live, and move, and have our being"; "In Him (Christ) all things consist"; "Upholding all things by the word of His power." The opposite error to this is the deistical—the idea that God, having made the world, and endowed it with its laws and forces, thereafter commits it to itself, and simply stands by, as it were, to see it go. True theism has always protested against this mechanical separation of God and His world. The world from moment to moment is sustained by the present power and activity of its Creator. Its laws are the expression of His will, its forces are the forthputting of His might. He is the ultimate Causality in all its causes; without Him it would collapse and vanish into nothingness. God is "through all," as well as "above all" (Eph. iv. 6).

This idea of God's immanence in His creation—including in this the natural world and also the spirits of men—is no novelty, and has not been denied, but, on the contrary, has been constantly affirmed by all sound theology. The old patristic theologian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, had an interesting distinction of the modes of God's presence with His creatures. He

distinguished, first, an essential presence of God, in that God was omnipresent in His being—everywhere; second, a presence in energy or power, acting in and through all forces; and, third, what he called a presence of goodwill, by which God is morally nearer to, or further from, His creatures, according to their moral dispositions. This is a true statement of immanence. The schoolmen, too, affirmed the same truth in their doctrine of “concursum”—that is, God’s presence and activity in and with all action of the creatures, so that without Him no acts of creatures could take place—and no worthy theology of modern times has left this idea out of it.

Here, then, we have the true element in the doctrine of immanence, and the so-called New Theology has no monopoly of this truth. But now let us look at the perversion of the truth, for much of which the New Theology must be held responsible.

God is universally present and ceaselessly active in His world, but a grave error is committed when God’s life is merged in the life of the world and identified with it, as if the only life which God has is that which we see in Nature, or are conscious of in ourselves. Wherever there is this indiscriminating identification of God with the life of the universe, we have crossed the line which separates a true theism from pantheism. Notwithstanding His immanence, the distinction of God from His world—His transcendence, as it is generally called—must be maintained. The world is not simply a developing, evolving organism, with God as its life, or soul, or inner law; it is the product of a free creative act of God, directed by His wisdom and distinguished from Himself in the very act of creating it. God, in other words, is not only in the world, but, as seen above, over it, possessing Himself eternally in the completeness of His own free personal life, and conscious of His ends and purposes in all that He creates and executes. He is in the world as the Creator, Sustainer, and Director of those laws and forces which it has been His will to call into existence—some lower, some higher; but these natural forces are still not His own proper life, but that of the creatures, and His perfect, complete life

subsists alongside of this and above it. "Lower" and "higher" are proper terms to apply to these powers of Nature (gravitation, electricity, vital forces, and the like), but God Himself is not higher and lower in them.

Especially when we come to human personality do we see the need of distinguishing between God's personality and the personal being of His creatures. Unless man is to be deprived of personality and freedom, we must acknowledge that he is a being who distinguishes himself from God, as one person distinguishes himself from another—that he has his own relatively independent life and responsibilities, which he cannot shift to any other shoulders. God, in like manner, distinguishes the spirit of man from Himself, and treats man as a being who has an individual life and destiny. We cannot simply merge God in the life of human souls—erring, sinful, imperfect—or directly identify the life of such souls with God, and call them "Divine." Man can receive a life from God into his soul, but he receives it by faith, trust, surrender, and not by mere nature.

In words, probably, the New Theology would admit most that is here said; but in fact it denies this truth, and derives all its newness from forms of thought and expression which imply that the life of God and the life of the world, including the life of souls, are one. Man is divine simply as man, simply as possessor of humanity; God is incarnate in humanity simply because humanity is supposed to be in essence one with God. This is to confound things that differ, and ignore the fact that Godhead expresses, not the life which God has as the Cause and sustaining Power of Nature, but the peculiar, eternal, and incommunicable life and mode of being which is His very own, and which He can share with no creature save in way of fellowship.

The peculiar effect of the teaching of the New Theology on the Divine immanence is seen at once in the doctrine of sin. If God's life is merged in the life of the world, and identified with it, there is no escaping from the conclusion that sin must be taken up into the life of God, and there lose its character as sin.

If the developing life of the world is God's life, then sin is an essential moment in that life, on the way to the realization of good; and our human estimate of it as something inherently evil can only be due to our relative, finite way of contemplating it, and has no validity from the absolute point of view. That this is the genuine outcome of the theory may be seen in nearly any of the books on the subject. Sin, as a rule, is connected with an evolutionary view of the world, and is regarded as a necessary stage in its development. The idea of sin is weakened down and attenuated till its awfulness in the light of God's holiness disappears; and the fears, terrors, remorse, that are connected with it are smiled at as superstitions. For God it has no real existence. He sees things in the light of the whole, where all is a beautiful harmony. It need not be said that on such a view the whole scheme of things in Scripture is swept away. The New Theology takes the bottom from all the evangelical ideas which depend on the belief that man is a sinner and needs redemption and regeneration. The Divine life is in every man's soul, and is struggling up to a final victory over present imperfection.

The doctrine of the Incarnation and of the essential Divinity of Jesus Christ is another of those truths which are revolutionized at the hands of the New Theology. It matters little whether, with the older Unitarians, we say, "Christ is man," or, with the New Theologians, "The man Christ is God," so long as both phrases in reality mean exactly the same thing. For the soul of Jesus, which the one calls human, the other calls Divine, and no change in attributes or personality is implied in the change of phrase. Incarnation is a process going on in Nature from its lowest stages up to its highest. It is God realizing Himself in finite form. The blade of grass is an incarnation of God; the insect, bird, beast of the forest, are higher forms in the sense that a more complete range of vital powers is involved in them; man, with his rational spirit, is a yet loftier realization; with humanity we have higher and nobler expressions of the essence of humanity, which is one with the

essence of God, and Jesus Christ is the highest expression of all—some would even allow the complete expression. It is a movement upward ; not, as in the Christian Gospel, the condescending act of One who, being in the form of God, stooped to become man for our salvation. It is man apprehended or estimated as God, not God who has taken upon Him, while retaining His essential Deity, the nature of man. The gulf between the two conceptions is really infinite.

Salvation, on this scheme, is not redemption in any proper sense, but simply growth, development, betterment—the evolution of the Divine life already in man throwing off lower imperfect stages and assuming higher.

But enough has been said to show that, by the first false step of sinking God's life in that of the world under a wrong conception of sin, the foundations of the Gospel of Christ, as we find it in the New Testament, are really subverted.

In the light of the above remarks on immanence one is in a better position to judge of some well-meant attempts to popularize a doctrine of what is called "Monism" as an improvement on the older theism. In a sense, of course, every truly theistic system is monistic. It denies dualism, or the existence of eternally distinct principles—say, of good and evil, mind and matter—and recognizes but one ultimate and eternal Being, Power, or Will, from which all else in the universe proceeds. It teaches that the world is God's creation ; that it derives its being and its powers from Him, and continues to exist by His sustaining energy constantly imparted to it. But then it contends at the same time, as seen above, that the world is not God, but is the creation of something other than God ; not simply an aspect or manifestation of God, but a constituted system of beings and forces which God distinguishes from Himself, and uses as the means for the revelation of His glory.

But it is precisely this fact of a distinction between God and the world which Monism, as ordinarily understood, rejects. For the idea of a creation of the world by God, and of a world

distinct from God, yet dependent on Him, it substitutes the notion of a Power, or Substance, or unknown Somewhat, of which the worlds of matter and mind are a two-sided manifestation—two aspects of the same Reality—identical in their origin, in their essential nature, in the power that operates in them. It is not with this connotation, we know, that our theistic Monists wish to employ the term; but it is still true that these ideas are deeply engrained into the word, and there is always a tendency in its expounders to fall back into them. For this reason we think it is better to discard the term “Monism” altogether, as prolific of misleading, if not of false, associations. The term is an unclear and ambiguous one, and Christian theology, while recognizing the truth that underlies its various uses, will do well to discard it for formulas better adapted to its own purposes.



## Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

BY THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.

XII.—HEBREWS XIII. 1-14.

THE last chapter of the Epistle has a character quite of its own. Unlike many of those often arbitrary divisions of the New Testament books which we know as chapters, it is a *naturally* separate section. The long and sustained arguments are over. The writer's thoughts, gravitating to a close, and occupied naturally as they do so with the personal conditions of his Hebrew brethren, attach themselves now to one, now to another side of their duties, their difficulties, their more particular and detailed needs, practical and spiritual. As he touches upon these, sentence by sentence, we often see at a glance the probable occasion of the words, but often again we are left in the dark about it. Who shall say precisely why he insists (ver. 2) upon the exercise of hospitality? or who were “the prisoners” (ver. 3) whom he bids them remember? Who shall tell what