

**REV. DAVID S. CLARK**  
**Pantheistic Modernism**

It had become conspicuously evident that the Modernism of the present-day is shot through and through with the philosophy of Pantheism. This was inevitable since most of the modern liberalism can be traced back through Ritschl to the theology of Schliermacher, and increasingly inevitable because the evolutionary philosophy, which characterizes Modernism and which gives less and less recognition to a theistic conception of the universe, naturally runs to Pantheism. If Spinoza were living to-day, he would be highly pleased to see how his philosophy has penetrated the church and influenced the highbrows of both secular and religious education.

Some years ago we sat in the class rooms of Princeton Theological Seminary. By our side sat a brilliant young man from the South. He was scholarly, forceful and enthusiastic. No one went out from the class better fitted to preach the saving power of Christ to a lost world than our dear old friend, John H. Boyd. His ability soon won him recognition and he became pastor of a large and influential church, the First Church of Portland, Oregon. From this field he was called to a professorship in McCormick Theological Seminary. In his farewell sermon to his Portland congregation, he said: "I have not pleaded with you to believe in God. I have not asked to bring your sins to be forgiven primarily. I have not asked you to believe in the realities of the spiritual world. I have asked you to believe in yourselves, in the divinity of men, in the greatness of the human soul. Men are what they are because of a fatal disbelief in their own divinity."

We were dumbfounded when we read such words. What had happened to our dear friend, John Boyd? We remembered his manliness, his ready tongue, his broken ankle in the gymnasium, his courageous spirit in the face of misfortune, and all our admiration. But what had come over him since we sat in the class rooms of Princeton? That is all explicable enough. He had drunk in the modern poison. He had simply changed his conception of God and man with all the logical implications. He had just dropped out the distinction between Creator and creature, and identified God and man. To him, man was a spark of God. Sin had little significance. It did not need to be forgiven in any serious way, it was just a failure, as yet, to arrive. Man must remember his own divinity and, remembering that, will be inspired to act accordingly. That, I take it, is the solution of our old friend's theological somersault. And the Pantheism of it is not hard to discover, and the same streak of Pantheism runs through all Modernism. It is to be regretted that the word "divinity" is so often used in a loose way. It may express a metaphysical and numerical identity with God, or just the product of divine creative activity, or an expression of divine purpose, but at any rate its effect in the lingo of Modernism is to bias men's minds toward Pantheism.

For further illustration we will refer to Professor Arthur C. McGiffert. Professor McGiffert was brought up an orthodox, psalm-singing United Presbyterian. He came to be one of the most conspicuous Modernists of this age. His remarks on the divine immanence so nearly express Pantheism that the difference would be difficult to mark. However some writers make the term immanence to connote identity. Dr. McGiffert says: "Divine and human are recognized as truly one. Christ therefore, if human, must be divine, as all men are." And again: "Christ is essentially no more divine than we are or than nature is." This is unconcealed Pantheism. All things are divine, whether you, or Christ, or a tree, or a snake, or a toad. God is substantially one with all things that exist, and Christ and man are the highest evolution of the divine substance.

Professor George Cross, of Rochester Theological Seminary, says in his book, *Religions of Authority*

*and Religions of the Spirit*, that “Protestantism denies that the natural and the supernatural are separate. It finds the supernatural within the natural and the divine within the human.” The quotation is an expression of thorough-going Pantheism. No one denies that the supernatural is within the natural if a careful distinction is made between immanence and identity. We believe in the immanence of God, an all-pervasive immanence; we can even acquiesce in this half of Spinoza’s famous dictum, viz., that “God is the Spirit within all spirit,” but when the natural and the supernatural are indefinitely and carelessly commingled, or when God and the universe are made identical, or the natural world is conceived as an emanation or evolution from the metaphysical essence or substance of God, we call that Pantheism. And Modernism is full of it. The tendency of Modernism is to humanize God and deify man; but that is just another evidence of its pantheistic viewpoint.

Professor Henry Nelson Weiman, of the University of Chicago, in a recent book, says : “This cosmic process which is God.” Dr. Fosdick speaks much to the same effect. Now that God is in the cosmical processes, no Christian denies; but such bold unqualified statements lead to a partial or entire denial of the personality of God and to the losing of him in the laws and forces of the universe. This is intended by the radical exponents of Modernism. Whatever destroys our conceptions of God in his strictest personality, destroys all spiritual values at the same time. That is the inevitable end of Modernism.

Philadelphia, Pa.

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