



ATONEMENT II:

Pagan

GNOSTICS (“KNOWERS”) BELIEVE that they will achieve “at-one-ment” with the cosmic God when they are liberated from their imprisonment in the fallen human body and the created order.¹ Other popular, post-modern cultic views of mankind and of God that impinge on the “at-one-ment” of God and man include pantheism, panentheism and deism.

“ . . . [Pantheism (*pan* = all; *theism* = god)] is really a sophisticated form of paganism, and asserts that there is only one god, or deity, namely the deity that permeates and characterizes the whole of reality. Pantheism is best known in the ancient world within the prevalent Stoic philosophy. The problem with pantheism is, of course, its apparent belittling of evil.^[2] All one can do about apparent evil is to rise above it, to deny its existence. . . . Within Stoicism, the world is involved in an endless cycle of life, and if one finds oneself sufficiently alienated from it the answer is simple: suicide.”³ Thus, for pantheists atonement is either irrelevant — since God is everything, including themselves — or they can attain “at-one-ment” through suicide.

Panentheism (*pan* = all; *en* = in; *theism* = god) assumes that everything is in God and/or God is in everything. However, because of the presence of evil, God lies hidden below the level of consciousness in what some regard as the “ground of all being.” For some panentheists, “at-one-ment” with god is achieved through what they define as “sacramental consciousness.” Thus, “the sacramental consciousness of panentheism develops into a transparent and diaphanous consciousness wherein we can see events and beings as divine.”⁴ For other panentheists, “at-one-ment” with God is attained only through the consciousness of “near-death experiences.”⁵

Then there is the concept of deism — an “eighteenth-century term for an older reality which was known in the ancient world, not least in the belief-system

of the Epicureans: the gods exist, but they live in a world of bliss quite removed from the present world, and do not intervene in our world at all.”⁶ For deists, therefore, “at-one-ment” of mankind with God does not occur and can never be achieved.

It should not be surprising that the escalating crises in our postmodern world are closely linked to widespread beliefs in Gnosticism, pantheism, panentheism and deism. Likewise, such crises are closely linked with the disparate views of these “isms” on mankind’s “at-one-ment” with God and also are closely linked with the common rejection of human relationality and with the abandonment of personal responsibility and moral accountability.

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Endnote

1. See “Atonement I: Prehistoric,” *Outlook* (March 2006).
2. As the Greek Stoic philosopher, Epictetus (55-135 ce), once said, “Nothing that is by nature evil can arise in the cosmos” (see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992], p. 249).
3. Wright, *New Testament*, p. 249.
4. See Harold Bloom. *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 186.
5. Ibid.
6. Wright, *New Testament*, p. 249.

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