

William Pierce and Cosmotheism
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During the early 1970s, the late white activist Dr. William Pierce formulated a religious orientation he called Cosmotheism to provide the spiritual basis for the direction he was taking in his racial work. Pierce had serious reservations about Christianity's appropriateness for white people and wanted to offer an alternative to it. The following material is drawn from my book on Pierce, *The Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds*.

"As I see it," Pierce told me, "Christianity has a number of elements that are harmful to our people. One of them is its egalitarianism. You know: 'the meek shall inherit the earth,' 'the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.' It's the whole Sermon-on-the-Mount idea of putting people down and pulling down those on the top of the heap regardless of how they got there. It is a fundamental part of Christian doctrine, and I think it is detrimental to an ordered society. When you look at Christianity you have to get beyond the requirements and rituals—you shall be baptized, you shall observe the marriage sacrament, and so forth—and see underlying things, like the egalitarian, Bolshevik message in this religion, which is really dangerous and has helped move us to this destructive democratic age.

"There is the universalistic message in Christianity, that we are all alike, that fundamentally there is no difference among people, that the only thing that counts is whether you are in or out of Jesus' flock. The 'we are all one in Christ Jesus' idea—man and woman, white and black, Greek and Jew. We are all equal in the eyes of the Lord. The truth of the matter is that we aren't all one, and we are different from one another, and some individuals and cultures are better than others. Anything that obscures that reality and its implications holds things back.

"Another idea inherent in Christianity is that what we do here on earth doesn't really matter. This life is just a testing ground; the

real action will go on someplace else, after our death. There is the notion that we don't have to really stay on the case because God has everything under control. He is watching us all the time and looking out for us, and He can push this button or that one and make anything happen He wants. We aren't in control, and in any case, we don't need to be because it's not really our responsibility, it's God's. To me, that comes down to an abdication of responsibility.

“There is all the superstition and craziness in Christianity. When they had their chance, Christians burned free thinkers, stifled intellectual development for centuries, and led people off to those suicidal Crusades. I see Christianity as more than a basically harmless aberration; it's a really dangerous one. At the same time I say that, I acknowledge that most Christians are reasonable and decent people. It's just that they haven't thought things all the way through. They aren't the problem—it's the doctrine.

"The European spirit is much more expressed in the pagan tradition of northern Europe. There was more of the idea that man is responsible for the world around him. He is responsible for his own actions. He's answerable to nobody but himself and his kinsmen. To live up to the European concept of honor and responsibility is to me far more in accord with our nature than trying to follow Christianity. I realize it is a complex subject because for a thousand years Christianity has been modified by European feeling, tradition, and religious ideas. That is how Christianity succeeded in gaining such a grip on Europe, by adapting itself to the conditions there."

I have some familiarity with the northern European pagan religions before the Christian influx, including Odinism. Odin is the father deity of Norse mythology. He rules over a pantheon of gods and goddesses, including Thor, the god of thunder. He is depicted as a fearless fighter who carries a spear and inspires fearless human warriors called berserkers. Along with being a fierce warrior, Odin is also the wisest god, having given an eye to drink from the spring of wisdom. I commented to Pierce that I

could understand how the Odinst image of a big, burly, bearded Viking-type wielding a spear or a battle-ax would have appeal to some people.

"Well, I can understand how the idea of a Viking with his battle-ax charging into a monastery and splitting some monk's skull and grabbing a silver crucifix off the altar and melting it down to make bracelets would be appealing. But really, that is a very one-sided picture. Raiding was one activity of the Vikings among many, and of course the Vikings were only one part of European culture and civilization. Although I will say I can relate to that Viking image much more than the idea of the crucifix, which seems so alien as a symbol of a religion. A man nailed to a cross, crucified. That just seems weird to me. It is hard for me to have a good feeling about that. It doesn't seem European to me. It would take somebody with a really alien mindset to choose something like that as a symbol for a religion. It is an execution scene. It's like if I were to start a new religion and chose as a symbol a man hanging from a gallows, or in an iron cage with crows pecking at his skeleton.

"One of the principal symbols of pagan religion is the tree of life, it's called The World Tree, which represents their cosmology. To me, The World Tree is a much more fitting symbol for a religion for our people."

The World Tree is a symbol for the continual creation of new life on earth amid the forces and creatures that tear at its roots—roots that remain, through it all, ever green. The World Tree also represents nature as the source of nourishment and healing to mankind. In The World Tree symbol there is the focus on this earthly world and man's embeddedness in nature and dependence on it. And there is the theme of renewal and growth amid struggle and adversity.

"There are a lot of people," Pierce offered, "who say, 'Where would we be without Christianity. We'd be raping and killing each other.' Well, we are raping and killing each other as it is. The fact of the matter is that before the dominance of Christianity,

Europeans kept that sort of thing pretty much under control through the ways communities were set up. They had rules that made sense in terms of their survival and way of life, and the rules were enforced, and more or less people respected the rules. There doesn't have to be some kind of supernatural sanction to keep people in line.

"One of the things I quote often comes from northern European non-Christian writings and it goes something like this: 'Cattle die and kinsman die, and so too must one die oneself. But there is one thing I know that never dies, and that is the fame of a dead man's deeds.' [It is from the *Hávamál*, a group of disconnected, fragmentary poems composed by unknown Norse poets between 800 and 1100 A.D.] Fame here doesn't mean fame in the way we think of it today—notoriety, having people know who you are, being a celebrity. In this case, fame means your reputation, the impression you make on the world and your fellow men while you are alive. If you live in a way that warrants it, your people will remember you for generations as a person who did great things or was exceptionally wise or just or courageous, whatever it was. That is the only immortality that is real, and that is a kind of immortality that can matter to people and really affect how they live. You don't need the promise of a life-after-death kind of immortality to get people to be good people."

Pierce needed a name for the spiritual orientation--or religion, or life philosophy, whatever best to call it--he had put together, and he came up with Cosmotheism. He can't remember where he got the term. I did some investigating and found that the English Romantic poet, critic, and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge used it in the early nineteenth century. In Coleridge's writings, in one instance he referred to an identification of God with the universe and in another to the worship of the world as God. The writer D.H. Lawrence was quoted as saying, "We and the cosmos are one. The cosmos is a vast living body of which we are all parts. The sun is a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins. The moon is a great gleaming nerve center from

which we quiver forever. All this is literally true, as men knew in the great past, and as they will know again." It could be that reading Coleridge or Lawrence was Pierce's inspiration. But it was a long time ago, and he doesn't remember.

I asked Pierce to help me understand Cosmotheism. He rose from his desk and went to a file drawer and pulled out some pamphlets, sorted through them a bit, and then handed three of them to me. "You can look these over. I wrote them on Cosmotheism back in the late 1970s."

I read through the three pamphlets and listened to a tape of a talk Pierce gave back in 1976 at one of the Sunday evening meetings he conducted called "Cosmotheism: Wave of the Future." I concluded that what Pierce calls Cosmotheism is a version of the religious orientation called pantheism. I won't go into the particulars of Cosmotheism in this context, which would get us into considerations of George Bernard Shaw's play *Man and Superman*, Plato's *Republic*, and the ideas of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and take us far afield. Basically, it comes down to aligning with, and serving, a "life force" that propels the upward development of the white race. It's enough here to place Cosmotheism in its pantheistic context.

Pantheism as a religious perspective and tradition differs from three others more familiar to us: theism (Judaism and Christianity are examples), atheism, and humanism. Even though pantheism doesn't have a strong foothold in Western society, it is far from a rare phenomenon in the world: Taoism, forms of Buddhism, Confucianism, the religions of American Indian tribes, and the pagan religions of northern Europe all embody a pantheistic outlook. Many Greek philosophers reflect a pantheistic outlook, including Plato and Aristotle and the Stoics, as did philosophers such as Spinoza, Fichte, and Hegel. Prominent literary figures whose work reveals a pantheistic perspective include William Wordsworth, Ralph Waldo Emerson, D.H. Lawrence, Robinson Jeffers, and Gary Snyder.

What is this perspective on the world? The words used to express the pantheistic orientation vary greatly, but what they all share is a picture of how everything fits together. Pantheists get beyond the particulars, this discrete entity and that one, to a perception of an all-encompassing and unified order to things. Pantheism is the view that everything that exists—nature, animals, human beings, everything—forms an integrated whole. To the pantheist, everything is interrelated. Human life is not independent and self-contained but rather an integral part of the world.

This stress on wholeness should not be taken to mean that pantheists contend that "all is one," that there aren't separate entities in the world, that the perception of distinctions is an illusion. Rather, pantheists—or most of them, anyway—say that the various elements that comprise the world are not *merely* distinct, and that most fundamentally, most importantly, they are not distinct. When pantheists look at the world, they see connectedness, they see unity.

What makes pantheism a religion and not simply a philosophy is that this unity that pantheists see is *divine*—it is *sacred*. To pantheists, the world isn't simply a set of interrelated concrete phenomena. There is more—call it God—and this “something more” infuses, permeates, the world. It is part of everything, and everything is part of It. It divinizes the world and makes it holy. When pantheists look at the world, they see God.

Pantheism can be better understood if it is contrasted with theism—again, Christianity and Judaism fall in this category. The theistic tradition is characterized by the belief in a personal god—that is to say, a god with the characteristics of a human being. This theistic god has a personality and bearing—like that of a commanding father perhaps. This is a god who can hear and see and pass moral judgment and make decisions and take purposeful action. He is focal: all power and holiness flow from him. He was so powerful that he had the power to create the universe, a universe which he now in a parent-like or monarch-like way oversees. He

is separate, distinct from nature and mankind. He is not of this world. He is apart, above, transcendent, looking down on us all.

The appropriate relationship to the theistic god is deferential and devotional. He is prayed to. He is an object of worship—the sole object of worship. The worshipper does not identify himself with god or seek to merge with god or become god; that would be blasphemous. Rather, the fundamental objective of religious practice in the theistic tradition is to establish a proper relationship with God. Cultivating this proper relationship gives the worshipper direction in living in accordance with God's will and in escaping God's displeasure or wrath. The worshipper gains strength and guidance from God—perhaps with the assistance of a messiah—in the lifelong task of achieving salvation, peace, and happiness, and perhaps ecstatic joy, in this life, and bliss and serenity in the next life.

In theistic traditions, there is the belief in personal immortality. The faithful will survive death in some form. Death is regrettable to be sure, but that regret is softened by the conviction that the next world will be a better place than this one is. In fact, in theistic traditions existence on earth is in large measure perceived as a time of preparation for the afterlife.

Like theists, pantheists believe in God; pantheism is not a disguised form of atheism or a substitution of naturalism for religious faith. Where the difference lies is that pantheists do not perceive of God as a person or anything like a person. The pantheistic god doesn't have a personality. It doesn't have a mind. It doesn't perceive as does a human being. It doesn't formulate intentions and carry out actions in response to circumstances in the manner of a person. Pantheistic religions tend not to play up the creator-of-the-universe conception of God as do theistic religions. There is more of a tendency in pantheism to attend to God and world—however they/it came to be—simply as realities to be encountered and taken into account at this time and in this life.

Pantheism denies the beyondness, the otherness, of God. God isn't up there, over there, someplace else, *transcendent*. God

is here, a part of all this, *immanent*. God penetrates everything in the universe. God is in nature. God is in human beings. God and man and nature are not distinct—or at least not totally distinct, or only distinct. What makes things a bit complicated is that while pantheism emphasizes God's immanence, there is also a tendency within this tradition to view the being of God as if it were not completely exhausted by the universe. That is to say, God has a transcendent dimension as well as an immanent one. Some have used the term panentheism (note the "en" in the middle) to distinguish the strand of pantheism that stresses both the immanent and transcendent quality of God. So we need to be careful not to set up rigid dichotomies. Still, however, the most useful distinction to keep in mind for our purposes is the basic one between a transcendent God (theism) and an immanent God (pantheism).

If God exists but isn't a person, then what is It? (To have used He at the end of this last sentence would have personalized God and been at variance with pantheistic thinking.) One finds a variety of words used to describe God within pantheism. God is described variously as The Force, The Divine Spark, The Principle of the World, The Plan for the Universe, The Spirit of the World, The Soul of the World, and The Divine Unity. These aren't the clearest of terms, but then again cloudiness of meaning is not unheard of in matters of religion, and they do communicate a basic sense of how pantheism conceives of God.

What is the proper relationship of human beings to the pantheistic god? Since God is not a person or separate from everything, it isn't a personal relationship in the way two people would relate to one another. There isn't a deferential posture toward this god. Rather than a worshipful response to the presence of God as one finds in theism, in pantheism there is respect, awe, wonderment. And rather than devotional practice, in pantheistic religions there is an emphasis on the search for knowledge of The Unity and the development of personal resources of a certain kind: namely, the understanding and wisdom and personal strength that

will contribute to one's living a life in accordance with The Unity or, another way to say it, that will allow one to integrate with the cosmos. Thus, meditative and contemplative activities are more consistent with pantheism than prayer. Really, any activity, intellectual or non-intellectual, that brings people into closer contact with things as they actually are and to a better understanding of how it all goes together and where they fit in the larger scheme of things, including a walk in the woods, is an appropriate religious practice within the pantheistic tradition.

Within pantheism, there is more of a focus on integrating into this world than winning forgiveness of sin or a place in the next world. In contrast to theism, this integration may include merging with God, coming to a realization of one's identity with, or sameness with, God. The result may be happiness and joy, but more likely it will be more along the lines of a thoroughgoing peace of mind or sense of being truly home.

Most pantheists deny the possibility that they will survive death in some conscious form, so they aren't seeking personal immortality through their religion. They tend to believe that whatever happens must happen in this lifetime and with no help from God or a messiah. For them, death is regrettable because it deprives us of experience and the possibility of doing further good on this earth.

It needs to be underscored that most pantheists are not monists. They aren't saying All is One. They aren't contending that there is only one Being and that all reality is either identical with it or modes of it. They are pluralists. They believe that there are many kinds of things. They don't regard the existence of real, finite entities as inimical to unity. As pluralists, pantheists don't see just one human nature but various human natures. Pierce carried this idea over to race. Where some would see one human race, he sees a number of human races.

In line with this pluralist mentality, pantheists don't believe there is just one way to live in accordance with The Unity. They don't insist on one lifestyle or set of activities for everyone. They

believe that personal wellbeing and the welfare of the whole will best be attained by people living within the parameters dictated by their own essential natures. The idea is to do what is natural to you given the reality of the whole of which you are a part.

Along this same line, pantheists don't hold up any human attribute as being on a higher plane than the others. A good mind, for example, can be positive and it can be negative depending on the use to which it is put. In fact, one picks up a coolness toward intellectual prowess in pantheism; or anyway, that it is not essential to a good life, and may actually interfere with it.

Pantheists are critical of humanism. They reject its secularized, human-centered worldview. In their eyes, humanism sets man up as the sole concern, as being all-important. Pantheists contend that humanists have substituted worship of man for the worship of God. This contradicts the pantheistic view of man as a part of nature, and that the meaning and purpose of life cannot, should not, be made with reference to human beings alone.

Pantheists usually believe in free will. Most often, they aren't determinists. They don't believe man's actions and fate are determined by either God's will or earthly circumstances. They believe in the power of choice and moral responsibility. They derive their concept of morality from the nature of the Divine Unity, not from the nature of a personalized God and His word. A person's conduct cannot be assessed apart from his overall context, pantheists believe. Pantheists judge the goodness of an individual act, and a total life, with reference to the individual's relationship to the Unity. Pantheists believe living in harmony with the Unity to be morally good, and living in discordance with it to be morally bad.

While pantheists believe in free will, they disagree with the existentialist posture that would have man alone determine the meaning of his life. They hold that there are dictates inherent in man's being and in his context that impose restraints and obligations on him and thus limit the scope of his freedom to simply choose his own path in life. Man is what he is and is a part

of everything, and these realities to a great extent direct how one should live. Man should not, say the pantheists, be viewed merely as an end in himself.

Pantheists are critical of a reliance on science as the source of answers to the questions of existence. Contend the pantheists, there is more to the world than can be accounted for by the natural sciences and their ways of knowing, their epistemologies. Pantheists don't claim to know all there is to know about the Divine Unity. They still have questions about creation, immortality, and the meaning and purpose of life, but they don't believe that science has the answers to them either.

Pantheists tend to love nature and seek to establish a relationship to things natural. They tend to believe that if one doesn't connect with nature, one is less likely to come to the pantheistic worldview. If one never hikes in the wilderness or gazes at the sunset or sails on the water, if one never gets out of his own little human orbit, he is less likely to see the pantheistic truths.

Pantheists live more in an ethical than mystical relation to nature. They perceive that living in proper relation to nature presupposes its preservation and protection. They tend to be environmentalists. They tend to be of a mind that technology despoils the environment and separates people from It. They tend to see urban life as averse to both personal well-being and the well-being of the Unity. At the same time, however, they tend to think of pantheism as an approach to life that can be lived out in any locale, including urban settings.

Pantheists regard organized churches and religious leaders with suspicion. They doubt that the life that pantheism seeks to attain can be facilitated by hierarchically organized, clergy-centered, empire-building religions.

Pierce had a doctorate in physics and had been a tenured university professor in that field. Modern science, he noted, has moved us from a static to a dynamic view of the universe, and pantheism aligns with that paradigm more than churches' conception of the world as a finished creation. Since Darwin,

Pierce points out, the world has come to be viewed as undergoing a continuous and not-yet-finished change or evolution. Cosmotheism is more in line with this perspective, he asserted, than theistic religions such as Christianity.