

Mightier Than The Sword (Part Twelve)

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My previous commentary ended with a brief introduction to the religion called Transcendentalism and its primary doctrine, Pantheism. The religion enjoyed a spurt of popularity before the first half of the 19th century ended, but it died out during the last half of the 19th century. It did not begin in America but was imported here and had its greatest concentration of activity and popularity in the Boston, Massachusetts area, primarily because of the influence of the Emerson family and most especially Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson wrote this while still a teenager and probably while attending Harvard:

Why may not I act and speak and write and think with entire freedom? What am I to the Universe, or the Universe, what is it to me? Who hath forged the chains of wrong and right, of opinion and custom? And must I wear them?

He was declaring to the world that he was not going to be bound by any laws or traditions or customs or practices or beliefs or ideas outside of himself. He was, in short, going to go his own way. It reveals the pride of one so young and foolish he could figure it all out for himself.

The heart and core of Transcendentalism was their doctrine of Pantheism. Pantheism literally means “all god.” In practical usage, it meant to those participating in it that the entire universe is god, and therefore, everything in the universe is a manifestation of God. It is, in brief, a worship of nature. It is a vague spiritual precursor of Darwinism.

You might recall that I mentioned that in his early youth, he had a great deal of contact with an aunt who schooled him in Buddhism. This doctrine of Pantheism seems to have been drawn directly from it.

Transcendentalists believed that society and social institutions, such as organized religion and political parties, corrupt the purity of individuals. Since they believe that the entire universe is god and each person is a manifestation of god, the guiding principles of life are already inside them. All each person has to do is find them. The first step to them is to know that conforming to what is already present in society is to be rejected. Thus, the guiding principle of Transcendentalism is the belief that people are at their best when they are self-reliant and independent.

Transcendentalism never became popular in the general public. However, it was popular within an active group of educators and religious leaders. Author Jeremy Bradley of Demand Media wrote, "That many of its core values and beliefs still affect American culture and political views."

You might recall that I made the statement in my previous commentary that American Christianity was about to receive a jolt as the 19th century began. That jolt came from Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. That jolt was Transcendentalism.

Jeremy Bradley's statement should give one cause to reflect on the source of the state of things in the U.S. because as Bradley continued on, "Transcendentalists believed that there was a higher law that guided the way society and its institutions worked. This idea of natural law continues to influence much of jurisprudential philosophy in the 21st century." This thing is coming home to roost.

Bradley tied this religion's central principles directly to the 21st century. He said the remnants of Transcendentalism still exist and he especially stated they are actively used in jurisprudential matters.

Let's define a couple of terms Bradley used. The first is "natural." "Natural" means, "produced by or existing in nature; not artificial, not something acquired, something innate." If a higher, purer law already exists within, who needs God and His word?

"Jurisprudential" is defined as, "the philosophy or science of law and its administration."

Recall that I have several times mentioned that certain philosophical concepts seem to attract the interests of certain groups of influential people in entirely different categories of learning. Emerson's concepts were unusually attractive to lawyers and ministers of religion. Here's comes the jolt, because some people bought it and it became central to their thinking. It is not that these people gave themselves over to the religion but they did allow themselves to be strongly influenced to the use of his ideas in *their* fields of study.

Emerson was particularly concerned with what he termed "self-reliance," or individualism or nonconformity. These were the highest goals of his concepts. He gives very strong approval of trusting one's self. He believed that inside of each person is genius. He wrote, "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius."

But it doesn't answer the question, "What if this person who believes in his own genius happens to be Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin or Mao Zedong or Nebuchadnezzar? How about the pharaoh of Egypt, or Nimrod and Semiramis?"

Emerson says that a man cannot bluntly obey society if he wants to follow his own expression. "No government or church can explain a man's heart to him, and so each individual must resist institutional authority." Lawyers love to split hairs regarding law. What is the definition of "is?" That became very popular a number of years ago. This is Transcendentalism right before your eyes.

I stated in my previous commentary that there indeed were nuggets of truth within the conclusions he reached regarding personal growth and complete belief in the self. However, the critical flaw in his thinking is that it is totally severed from the reality of the Creator. Who needs a Creator when you are yourself a genius?

To Emerson, the perfection of each individual was already within the person. God's approach is that it must be *created* in each person by an external influence, and that external influence is a relationship with God Himself.

Nobody, brethren, is going to get around that. This is absolutely essential because only God knows all truth and how it applies.

Emerson's concepts are also completely divorced from the reality of the ruler of this world, Satan the Devil, whose world we live in, and through what Satan has created each individual's thinking can be formed to proceed what he—Satan—desires if the person does not resist.

I mentioned Emerson created a jolt to Christianity. It has never recovered because churchmen gradually declined in their teaching of one's calling, conversion, and *the* God's new creation of man in the spiritual image of Jesus Christ. That was a departure that did not happen overnight. It just gradually took over the thought processes of the Christian church. It has, in small increments, thrown our whole society into chaos. Now we've even got people teaching that homosexuality—which is "natural"—is good. That is Transcendentalism. After all, it is "natural," isn't it?