God and the World Paper

Assignment 3-2 for ST5534 Systematic Theology 1

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Immanence and transcendence help us deal with how God interacts with the world and looks at a few points like how present and active God is as well as how distinct and removed He is from the world. Erickson compares the two of these to God’s love and justice, which one may think conflict with each other but instead they balance one another. Erickson explains in more detail “where immanence is overemphasized, we lose the conception of a personal God. Where transcendence is overemphasized, we lose the conception of an active God.”[[1]](#footnote-1)Erickson is also careful to point out that these are not attributes of God but they are in relationship with the attributes of God because they deal with how God relates to the world.

Erickson describes immanence as God’s presence and activity within nature, humans and history. Immanence shows itself in many ways throughout the Bible but one of those ways is in Jeremiah 23:24 “Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.”[[2]](#footnote-2) God clearly displays Himself throughout creation but He does not depend on these things to exist, as pantheism would say. Erickson says it well when he talks about nature minus God being nothing at all but God minus nature still being something. When I say nothing I mean something as in creation needed God to exist in order to be around but God did not need creation to exist because He always was and is God before anything was made.

Transcendence is Erickson’s next point, which he describes as “separate from and independent of nature and humanity.” [[3]](#footnote-3) God is separate from this world in that He is distinct but I believe we have to careful on this point not to confuse this with deism, which is a belief that God created everything and is now completely hands off not interfering with things. In Isaiah 57:15 we see that this is not the case with God when it says “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:I dwell in the high and holy place,and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,to revive the spirit of the lowly,and to revive the heart of the contrite.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Displayed here is God’s transcendence by inhabiting eternity and dwelling in the high and holy place as well as with those of us who are repentant and low in spirit. Isaiah here is putting on display that God is not only transcendent but also immanent in His relationship with the world.

Deism and Pantheism are two-world views that many people can easily fall into the trap of these days. I have personally experienced throughout my time in undergraduate classes many people that would fall under the deism title even though they didn’t identify as a deist. I believe people like the idea of a God that created this world but stays far away because it gives them a sense of purpose or meaning without having to feel ashamed of their sin. Erickson does a great job at balancing the need for both immanence and transcendence and shows us practically why these matter to our studies of God.

1. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The MacArthur Study Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The MacArthur Study Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)