

CHRISTIANITY BY CONTRAST: SKETCHES

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Prolegomena

Law of Contrast/Law of Opposition. Ideas are clearest in contrast to their parallel alternatives. The principle applies to clear thinking and proper interpretation.

The whole provides the context for its parts. The character of the whole sets the character of its constituents.

Continuity of kind between cause and effect, purpose and result, problem and solution: Matthew 7:16-20; 12:33-35; Luke 6:43-45, James 3:12.

Good and bad are always figured relative to purpose.

Basic elements of reality: being, action, relationship

Kinds of processes: hypostatic, legal, metaphysical, interpersonal

Ways of affecting other people's actions: influence, authority, and force.

Misidentifying the problem as some non-interpersonal matter misdirects to the wrong solution: works as doing, miracle as necessary manifestation, individual identity (to be overcome in the sea of ultimate non-differentiation), mixture of spirit and matter, loss of form in matter as the cause of evil, conflict of national identities, inability to respond as due to ontic depravity

The Interpersonal Nature and Purpose of Christianity

The Great Commission: Matthew 28:18-20

The Ministry of Reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:12

The Primacy of Love: aspects, expression, and implication: 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:22.

The central vocabulary of Christianity: love, faith, promise, grace, mercy, repentance, forgiveness, Christ, and like terms.

The great summaries of the faith: James 1:27: "*Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: visiting the fatherless and widows in their afflictions and keeping oneself unspotted from the world.*"

Matthew 7:12: Golden Rule—Second Great Commandment in Leviticus 19:18.

Old Covenant preparatory understandings

Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5: First Great Commandment

Habakkuk 2:4: "*The just will live by faith/will have life by trust.*"

Micah 6:8: "*What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.*" Cp. Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

Hosea 4:1: "*There should be truth, goodness, and knowledge of God in the land.*"

What is most original (Genesis 1:3), most eternal (1 Corinthians 13:13), and most inclusive (God with people in his image as the interpersonal capacity, all races, both sexes, every societal class)

PROBLEM to be Solved: Interpersonal alienation



Proposed generalization: every perversion of the Christian faith has been some kind of departure from its interpersonal character and purpose.

Accompanying proposition: there is no basis for bringing non-interpersonal issues into the picture that are not already there in secondary position. Such matters represent foreign elements brought into the Christian endeavor.

Major Hindrances to the Christian Enterprise

Judaizing:

Legalism and nationalism: The Judaizers attempted to retain law and nationalism and add to it the message that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic expectancy. To put it differently, they attempted to add Messianism to Mosaism.

Constantinian Perversion

In about A.D. 312, Constantine started combining Christianity and the political state. Along with that move toward nationalizing Christianity came the rebirth of something like what the original Judaizers envisioned.

Augustinianism

Hypostasis: Augustine attempted to formulate a philosophy of evil that would replace the Manichean idea that matter and spirit corresponded with evil and good. Instead of saying that matter is evil, Augustine tried to say that evil is a deprivation in the form of matter relative to its pristine condition. He attempted to account for natural and moral evil in that same way. As a result, it brought in the unbiblical notion of natural depravity and its accompanying requirements of biological transfer plus miracle to reverse the biologically inherited fallen nature when it comes to salvation.

Calvinism

Legalism: John Calvin and his heirs have combined Augustine's hypostatic thinking with legal process and produced an array of unbiblical doctrines in various combinations: unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints, eternal security, guilt transfer, ontic regeneration. These elemental departures supernaturalize and legalize salvation, Christian living, and the Christian experience.

Christianity and Other Religions

The General Proposition: The things that have perverted the faith over the centuries are approximately the things that destroy its distinctiveness from other religious systems. They amount to some kind of non-interpersonal elements that are not already in the Christian system in secondary position.

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