GOD AND INTERPERSONALISM

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Interpersonalism applies to the ultimate frame of reference in that deity forms a three-person unity. In philosophy, "God" refers to ultimate reality. In scripture, this reality is personal because he is counselor who has no counselor (Psalm **11**:3-4), his pleasure is what measures all doing, and his glory is the effect of everything that happens (Ephesians **1**:11; Psalm **19**:1). Interpersonalism represents the most complex form of existence. It stands to reason that if it exists in the created realm, it should be present in what originated everything in the created realm. The stream, we say, cannot rise above its source. The most inclusive understanding of God is at the "corporate," or triune, level. The traditional doctrine of trinity combines into one concept unity, diversity, equality, and order and puts it before all other reality. Note the title *The Eternal We*, by Harold J. Green (Chicago, Ill.: Loyola University Press, 1987). Trinity is not just any kind of threeness-in-oneness; it is an interpersonal threeness-in-oneness.

Saying that interpersonalism (trinity) in God is the case is a different thing from needing to understand it fully to relate to him. Otherwise, it would be clearer in the Bible, especially for those living before Christ.

Interpersonalism avoids the specter of a self-centered God who creates and wills to his own glory. Ephesians **1** points out that human behavior redounds to the glory of God's grace. The implication is that by virtue of grace God himself has first given. By creating what is, God bears responsibility for creation, including personal beings. The association between God and his personal creation is not an impersonal one that manipulates, demands, and coerces; nor does he operate in a one-directional fashion from above to below. It is an association in which, after creating, he also gives of himself to what he has made; and the glory that comes to him is not so much demanded by him as motivated in us. His glory comes from our free response of gratitude for his previous grace.

God's <u>authority</u> flows from his <u>responsibility</u> by virtue of <u>creatorship</u> and <u>grace</u>. Divine authority does not result from ascendancy through conquest as if might makes right; creation and grace are what makes right.

Christianity can consider understanding all reality as <u>theology</u>. Every aspect of the whole falls under the terminology "the theology of ____." Such wording means that each topic is thought of in connection with the ultimate frame of reference: a theology of leisure, theology of science, a theology of social concern. The Judaeo-Christian conception makes person ultimate; hence, it makes theology possible. Otherwise, it would merely be philosophy, a more depersonalized system.

God as the ultimate frame of reference does not represent an <u>idea</u>. He is not the "god of the gaps," a mere symbol for the unknown; he does not represent the missing pieces in human knowledge—with the result that he is a diminishing quantity as knowledge increases. Moreover, he is not merely an idea like the principle of order.

One reason that confirms seeing ultimate reality as (inter)personal is that the patterns of reality are not absolutely uniform. Nature does not vary from what is built into it, because nothing transcends it to alter it. In keeping with this observation, we cannot always get what we want by scientific means. The most important value of interpersonalism over nature lies in the potential intervention of God's mind and will into it to set it aside to gain a larger purpose.

There is a difference between <u>impersonal uniformity</u> and <u>personal consistency</u>. Persons can use more than one way to achieve the same goal; they may create new ways to do it. The results are not <u>deterministically produced</u> but <u>creatively produced</u> in a pattern.

Another way of handling this lack of uniformity is to suppose that we simply do not understand the physical laws well enough. If and when we do, these apparent disconformities would disappear by refinements in what we understand.

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