

THE RELATIONSHIP OF INTERPERSONALISM TO NON-INTERPERSONAL MATTERS

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Interpersonalism refers to the fundamental character of reality. As such, it is a claim about worldview. Interpersonal refers to the presence of the interpersonal element, but the addition of *ism* describes the pervasive nature of things. The same goes for legal vs. legalism, for determined vs. determinism, for scientism, and so on. In the latter instance, the word no longer describes an aspect, but characterizes the whole. It becomes that by which a person integrates as much as possible of what belongs to the whole. Only after that exercise does he bring in secondary matters to account for exceptional or practical matters.

In speaking of interpersonalism, then, we mean that the foundational character of Christianity and the Christian worldview is interpersonal. Other matters can be involved in operational reality, so we do not have a simple, monolithic kind of reality. But authority/law/organization and ritual/form/symbol are overlays, not determinative aspects of reality. They are added factors rather than primary ones. Interpersonalism qualifies and limits whatever is added to it if the overlay creates conflict. Interpersonalism directs the manner and purpose of using non-interpersonal things.

So, interpersonal does not exclude other kinds of things, but it does limit their scope and manner of application. For example, interpersonalism eliminates making self-centered laws to use against other people or using force in a self-centered way to obtain selfish ends. Interpersonalism shapes the character of non-interpersonal aspects in the practical working of the whole real situation.

Interpersonalism does not just relate to the major kinds of things. It is the primary source of reality for all of them, directly or indirectly. It is the originating truth that explains everything except those purposes and goals that are more restrictive than the range of potentiality in interpersonalism itself. Such matters are taken care of by positive commandment to restrict the broader character of creation, because creation itself only approximates the purposes of God.

Consequently, interpersonal reality is what gives vitality and special meaning to other kinds of things. Interpersonalism gives value and meaning to material things, so possessions become meaningful when they become means of personal expression. The body as an instrument of expressing the soul/spirit becomes more meaningful than when it is regarded as the center, the basis, or the end in itself. Legal matters should be used for interpersonal ends (“lead us to Christ”). Interpersonal qualities make ritual into meaningful expressions of these qualities, and in

reverse they help crystallize a person's commitment to these qualities. Ideas are relatively uninteresting unless they are imbedded in a personality.

A. Interpersonalism and Cosmology

In general, interpersonal precedes impersonal both chronologically and logically. The interpersonal (triune) God preceded the impersonal creation. One capacity of personhood is creativity; hence, the impersonal cosmos comes after, and is subordinate to, the interpersonal by virtue of creativity.

B. Interpersonalism and History

In keeping with the potentials of personal creativity, the Christian view of history can be linear rather than cyclical, because personal creativity has potentially within it the new. Consequently, history can go somewhere new rather than be limited to the finite number of options that have always been and cannot increase because they are deterministically limited. Under the Judaeo-Christian view of God there can be eschatology and there can be history in the technical sense because history is going somewhere and is meaningful, which is the primary significance of the doctrine of predestination. (See the interpersonal essay entitled "Eschatology.")

Personalized creation implies personalized history and providence. If the ultimate frame of reference is interpersonal, then all events that occur in the universe are in some sense connected with the personal. Instead of a deistic god who creates and leaves, scripture pictures a Father God who stays and directs. All occurrences, good or bad, are either allowed to happen or are instigated directly or indirectly by him. We have neither a universe gone wild nor one deterministically carried forward by inbuilt law alone.

The goal of history is not monolithic oneness but interpersonal unity. We therefore do not seek to lose individuality by entering into an ultimate impersonal One. The goal is not loss of individuality but proper relationship of individual persons.

C. Interpersonalism and Law

(1) Interpersonalism does not eliminate law. That is the reason Paul could observe as he does in Galatians 3 that the law added 430 years later did not annul the earlier promise to Abraham. The *promise* to Abraham preceded the *law* through Moses. Law and promise are mutually exclusive as to kinds of things (3:17-18) even as law and faith are different kinds of things (3:11-12). Law, or legal process, is a secondary principle; but promise and faith—or interpersonal process—are the primary principle. Law is good if it is used lawfully (1 Timothy 1:8), not as an end in itself or as a final court of appeals, but as a superadditum, to reinforce the

interpersonal enterprise. Law does not eradicate the interpersonal but leads to it (Galatians 3:24). Law is a teaching aid, a definer of righteousness, a director/leader that points beyond itself to something better—interpersonal process (“Christ”; 3:24).

(2) Law and ritual require positive commandment for establishing them. This is so because the acts do not arise inherently and positively from the nature of the case.

(3) Legal and ritual factors are always added for practical purposes. They are added in a way that does not annul (cp. Galatians 3:15-22) the basic nature, which means that the basic nature limits, contextualizes, transcends, qualifies, overrides this additional element. Paul addresses this principle of secondary addition without fundamental cancellation when in Galatians 3-4 he teaches that law/the-law was added to promise but so as not to invalidate promise. Promise-faith-grace speaks of interpersonal operation; law-works-merit speaks of legal operation. Legal authority can be added to interpersonal promise, because law and promise address different things. Law can be added to interpersonalism as long as law does not become ultimate, which is what the Pharisees had done. Since law was added to promise, promise qualifies law and its role in divine-human activity. What chronologically preceded law in heilsgeschichte (faith) also logically precedes it.

In regard to organization, form/authority/law is added to harness power. This function resembles clarification because it helps people know who should do what, and so on. It also helps avoid duplication and implicitly establishes a communication system telling people who does what.

(4) The exercise of the legal is always within the boundaries of interpersonal concern and welfare. This addition comes in for practical reasons, but only insofar as, and to the extent that, it enhances rather than hinders fundamental operation. “Special circumstances,” then, have a way of being taken into consideration inasmuch as what is more essential/basic/central/ultimate/fundamental pre-empts law and form. Secondary elements sometimes have a way of getting in the way of primary ones. Secondary elements, being approximate, do not necessarily fit all situations. The “pre-emptibleness” of law/authority/form/ritual/structure/institution is what we must remember about law and form in order to see their value and their limitation, to appreciate them and yet transcend them, to use them and not abuse them. Interpersonalism calls for full reciprocity, but only relative to communication. Authority, then, can be added without vitiating interpersonal process. There can be exceptions to law and form, but there can be no exception to interpersonalism (love).

D. Interpersonalism and Rites

In an interpersonal system, all rites must have an interpersonal dynamic to make them useful and relevant. Unless ritual acts are interpersonalized, they function in the realm of

legal/political operation. If so, their validity can be detached from the interpersonal, dynamic factor. Since Christianity has an interpersonal character, the validity of its ritual acts requires the presence of the interpersonal. Only if baptism were connected with non-interpersonal matters would its validity exist aside from faith. To put it negatively, the validity of ritual cannot rest in the form *per se*, the authority of law as such, the validity of the officiate, and the like.

Baptism—a rite—focuses into a point what in many respects is a process. In so doing, ritual and form clarify by making matters more tangible, concrete, and exact. Ritual and form help define who we are and give us a sense of measurable, quantifiable progress in something that is not exactly categorical or quantifiable. It helps people define themselves by helping them see where they are. Many formal acts like baptism are rites of passage. Their function is to reduce a process to a point. The formal rite is instituted as a manner of expressing dynamic matters to the viewer and as a means of focalizing dynamic matters for the doer. There is a reciprocal interaction between self-expression and self-impression.

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