

CREATION IN INTERPERSONAL CONTEXT

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Interpersonalism puts the personal ahead of the impersonal. Person and personal aspects like mind, will, emotion, and conscience do not arise epiphenomenally from the impersonal, but by virtue of mind operating through will, the personal creates the impersonal (Genesis 1:1-5ff) and orders it (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7-15). The personal is eternal, but the impersonal has beginning and end.

Interpersonalism puts the personal God ahead of the created universe. Not only is the created universe not the ultimate frame of reference; it is not abstracted from its ultimate personal creator. None of God's works are to be regarded apart from him or considered discretely in and of themselves whether creation, revelation, providence, or redemption. The universe has not always been here; it had a beginning from the transcendent personal creator, who had no beginning. It will also have an end, but he is eternal. The doctrine of creation from nothing is unique in ancient religions. And Judaeo-Christianity is unique in having a relational God of principle as the highest frame of reference.

The approach to creation calls for us to personalize the universe, not personify it, depersonalize it, or "animate" it. To personalize it means to regard it as an expression of its personal creator. The difference in our attitude toward it and impression from it is like the difference between a store-bought dress and one handmade by a grandmother who loves you (cp. the attitude of the people toward the handiwork of Dorcas; Acts 9:39). Personalizing one's circumstance with love transforms what a person sees in it: *"There were birds in the sky, but I never saw them winging—No, I never saw them at all till there was you."* In speaking about dietary foods, Paul says all of God's created things are good, because they are sanctified by God's word and our prayer; God's speaking brought it into existence (origin) and our speaking thanks him for it (use). God's speaking it and our thanking for it interpersonalizes on both ends what is not itself personal (1 Timothy 4:4-5). Even more so, the universe is God's own handiwork. When we *"see the stars and hear the rolling thunder,"* we stand in awe of God's personal power. When we look at creation as from God's hand, *"Something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen"* ("I Am His and He Is Mine"). The universe is not God's "body" as something that belongs to him, but it is an expression of his creativity. Nature is not an aspect of him, an emanation from him, or an extension of him. He declares himself through it; it is his speech to us (Psalm 19:1-6).

This approach contrasts with personifying the universe as if it were itself a large person (pantheism) or were pervaded by a universal Mind (panentheism). We do not animate it as if all

discrete parts have conscious identities (animism). The universe itself is impersonal, but it is an expression of a person. It is not—as in evolutionary parlance—that “Mother nature” does this or that. We do not just admire nature; we worship the God who created nature.

Genesis 1 pictures God as speaking the universe into existence: “*And God said.*” The created realm comes from a person by personal means. It does not demonstrate sheer power, but powerful, personal word.

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