

## PHILOSOPHY

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### THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND OF AMERICAN PERSONALISM

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#### **Abstract**

The article reconstructs the horizons of perceiving God-Breathed Book which were established by the personalistic trend sprung from the Protestant soil in North America. The author substantiates the approach to investigating the genesis of personalism which is based upon the meta-ontology of the personhood revealed in the Bible topoi of personal being. Their transmission into the concepts of the personalist philosophy is considered to be the kernel strain of revealing the meta-ontological dimension of the person in the philosophical-humanitarian space. Therefore the study focuses on the scope of ultimate communication which was formed by Elizabethan Scripture translations recognized as the spiritual foundations of Protestantism in the USA and providing the personalized access to God's Word for English-speaking philosophers aimed at comprehending the theistic basis of the personality in the New World.

**Keywords:** Personality of God, human person, Bible translations

The personalist philosophy of the USA founded in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries hasn't exhausted its sense-generating resource by systematizing the philosophical consciousness of North America awaken in the age of Enlightenment by practical idealism (Samuel Johnson) and activated in the era of Romanticism by transcendentalism (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Amos Bronson Alcott)). In fact the

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founding fathers of the personalistic trend in the New World - Borden Parker Bowne (1847–1910), George Holmes Howison (1834–1916) and Josiah Royce (1855–1916) – reflected both personal spiritual experience accented in the domestic “ideal practice” of establishing the real morality and person's intuition emphasized in the “native” theory of transcending to the true knowledge. Trying to overcome the abstract definitions of the fundamental categories of philosophy by reuniting spirituality and rationality on the base of theism, they correlated the initial philosophical manifestations of North American mind in the course of regarding the personhood (indicated by the taxonomy Person/Individual) as the principle of being. Inspired by arguing for “the failure of impersonalism” [1], such personalization of ontology actualized in the social-cultural space of the USA the intention of defining the ontological status of personality and affirmed the reception of the classical tradition of philosophizing as a way of its fulfillment. Taking into consideration that the founders of personalistic mode of thinking in North America performed the attempts of clarifying the core item of the personal identity in the scope of metaphysics and phenomenology (on its foundations laid by I. Kant) the historical-philosophical reflection of their creative works should recognized the reasonability of the characteristics of American personalism given in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by W. H. Werkmeister. The authoritative expert in the history of ideas born in Germany, but known as a prominent figure of the scientific society of the USA defined it as “the first complete and comprehensive system of philosophy developed in America which has had lasting influence and which still counts some of our outstanding thinkers among its adherents”[2]. But in spite of its formal completeness and systematic character, the classical personalist doctrine formed on North American continent has not been finalized as a stage of the historical-philosophical process. Having predicted along with the non-classical philosophical trends of the Old World the kernel problematics of contemporary philosophy self-defining as “after-postmodernism” opposing to the postmodernist classics the personalistic movement arisen in the USA manifests itself in philosophical-humanitarian dimension of contemporaneity as a developing branch of thought opened to the dialogue with the emerging post-non-classic tendencies of philosophizing. Accumulated by the five generations of philosophers the cognitive potential of American personalism is called for substantiating the approaches to solving the problem of personality reactualized in the course of deconstructing both metaphysical and phenomenological

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concepts of subjectivity reduced by these representations to the impersonal origin of being and thinking.

The self-reflection of the personalistic trend founded in North America at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries connects its position in the historical-philosophical process with its inner logic grasped as the progressive development of thought directed to the understanding of the personality as the ultimate reality. Emphasizing the priority of the personalist philosophy of the USA in disseminating the philosophical discourse over the New World, both originators of this national-historical branch of philosophizing and their followers consider the comprehension of the person's primacy to be the clue point in the history of ideas. Such vision was conceptualized by the Boston school of personalism giving the start to its rise on North American continent under the auspices of B. P. Bowne. The teleological model of forming the personalistic worldview was introduced by Albert Cornelius Knudson (1873–1953), outstanding representative of this academical community and pioneer of research for the historical roots of the personalist doctrine. He believed that it was “the ripe fruit of more than two millenniums of intellectual toil, the apex of a pyramid whose base was laid by Plato and Aristotle.” [3]. Based upon defining the reflection of personal principle of being as “one of the oldest and broadest currents in the history of human thought... organically and structurally related to the spiritual philosophy of all the ages” [3], this conception of generating the personalistic trend reveals its national-historical application in the context of manifesting American thinkers' initiative for the explanation of irreducibility of the personhood in the space of philosophizing. The superiority of America in the formation of personalism as a modern philosophical branch was declared by B. P. Bowne in the letter to his wife dated by May 31, 1909. In this message the Methodist minister, theologian and philosopher recognized as the father of American personalism [4; 5], presented himself: “I am a Personalist, the first of the clan in any thorough-going sense” [6].

In such a way the idea of personalizing the ontology formulated in the USA at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was affirmed as a key moment of developing the personalistic mode of thinking actualized by the classical philosophical reflection appealing to spirituality into the theistic trend of non-classical philosophy conceptualizing the communion of the human person with the Absolutely Personal God. Formed in the sphere of “inner vision” of American personalism this understanding of its historical mission is supported by two

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significant factors defining the genesis of the personalist branch of philosophizing in North America.

Firstly, in contradistinction to the radical departure from the philosophical tradition declared by the initiators of the European personalistic rejection of its impersonalist trends - Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950), and Jean Lacroix (1900 – 1986) – the apology of the personhood in the USA was based upon the revision of metaphysics and phenomenology (in Kantian version) aimed at overcoming their impersonal tendencies. Such reinterpretation of the classics of philosophy was performed by the originator of the Bostonian hub of personalist thought, his disciples Edgar Sheffield Brightman (1884–1953), Francis J. McConnell (1871–1953), George Albert Coe (1861–1951), Ralph Tyler Flewelling (1871–1960) and the Harvard scholars William James (1842–1910), William Ernest Hocking (1873–1966) and Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000) manifesting themselves as personalists.

Moreover in the process of studying the heritage of rationalism the thinkers involved in forming American personalism reduced the spiritual source of the personality to the personalized *ratio* breaking the soil for growing up the genealogical tree of the personalist philosophy embracing all the branches of the rationalist reflection accenting or implying the cognitivity as the core of the Self. Such intention of increasing the proper philosophical genealogy of the personalistic thinking was realized in the most consistent way by R. T. Flewelling. Defining the start of personalism in the history of ideas, he stated: "It is, in basic principle, as surely expressed in the affirmation of Heraclitus (536 - 470 B.C.) that the fundamental reality is mind because it alone, of all creation, has the power to differentiate itself from the objective world and even from its own experiences, asserting that this Logos is the permanent principle in a world of change. Anaxagoras (500 - 430 B.C.) showed the same personalistic trend in affirming mind to be the foundation of existence, the force that arranges and guides. Protagoras (480 - 410 B.C.) named this differentiating capacity of the person as the basis of all knowledge and science, expressing it in the famous phrase: "Man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are; of things that are not, that they are not" [7].

Secondly, the appeal of the personalist branch of philosophy risen in the USA to the ratiocentric mainstream of philosophizing led to the semantic transformation of metaphysical and phenomenological (in Kant's actualization) concepts directed at the categorial systematization of the doctrine prioritizing "the personality as the ultimate explanatory, epistemological, ontological, and axiological principle of all reality" [8] in the New World. "The

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textual activity” (R. Barthes) marking the development of personalism on North American continent has provided its involvement into the intertextual dimension of philosophical discourse formed by the interaction of different modes of thought and revealing the limits of rationality departed from spirituality at the contemporary stage of the historical-philosophical process defined as the formation of post-secular philosophy by its self-reflection [9; 10].

Indicating the important features of rising the personalistic trend in the USA the accented genealogical characteristics of this national-historical type of philosophizing don't exhaust its viability ensured by the capacity of modifying its constructs and interacting with other modalities of thinking. The research of Christian genealogy of personalized forms of ontology [11] proves: it should be taken into consideration that “dialogue openness and liberality of American personalist philosophy are determined by its Protestant basis devoid of dogmatic stability” (hereinafter the translation is mine – V. P.) [12]. The withdrawal from the dogmata of Christianity made in the course of establishing the personalistic explanatory model in North America was declared by B. P. Bowne in his attacks against “any form of dogmatism or fundamentalism..., especially...held by the religious leaders in the Methodist Church” [13]. Thus, “the unsteadiness of theological foundations” [12] of this national version of personalism motivates its “persistent search for new ways of identifying the personal providing succession, dynamics and progressiveness of developing the personalist doctrine in the USA” [12]. Therefore it is drawn “into the epicentre of problematizing the criteria of personality” [12] substantiated by rationalism and exposing their unreliability in the context of the crisis of person's identity provoked by worldview and value eclecticism of postmodern.

To clarify the influence of theology of Protestantism on the process of forming the personalist thought on North American continent the study should start with the explication of the horizons of perceiving the Scripture text which were established by English Bible translations performed in the period of Reformation to realize the idea of providing the personal access of the English-speaking people to “God-Breathed Book” (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

This starting-point of exploring the theological ground of American personalism is predicted by comprehending the meta-ontological character of the problem of personality unsolvable by means of ontology. Inspired by realizing the impossibility of objectivizing the person's existence in ontological abstractions the personalistic movement marked the complicated trajectory of approaching the Revelation on which the scope of comprehending

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the meta-ontology of the personhood revealed in the Biblical topoi of personal being is determined by confessional affiliation and spiritual experience of philosophers-personalists.

The meta-ontological dimension of the personality expounded by patristic trinitology at the turn of Antiquity and the Middle Ages was disclosed for the rational consciousness of modernity by the current of personalism based upon Orthodox theology. In the discursive field formed by the personalistic mode of thinking the terminological neologisms intended to reunite spirituality and rationality in the personal self-reflection were introduced by V. N. Lossky (1903 - 1958), one of the greatest apologists of the personhood in the twentieth century. In such a way he fixed the ascent of thought from ontological depersonalization of being to trinitarian meta-logic explaining Absolute Personality of God and godlikeness of human person. V. N. Lossky confirmed: "And if it is certain meta-ontology, only God can know it, that God, Which Genesis show us during the pause in His creativity made to say at the Pre-Eternal Council of Trinity Hypostases: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" [14].

Based upon perceiving the Bible topology of the personhood in the space of interlingual communication formed in the modern era the personalistic explications of meta-ontological dimension of the personality depend on those ways of transmitting God's Word into human languages that were paved in the late-traditional period to ensure the communion of the created person with Creator by rendering the Scripture into his/her native tongue. Thus, focusing on the theological foundations of personalism developed in the USA, the philosophical-historical reconstruction of forming it as a type of reflection implies the definition of its Biblical background that is the aim of investigation in this article. The way of realizing the indicated purpose is determined by the methodological approach verifying the transmission of the Scripture topoi of personal being performed in the translations of God-Breathed Book by the meta-ontology of the personhood disclosed in the course of substantiating the doctrine of the Trinity by the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church in the golden era of theology.

The rise of the personalist philosophy in North America was directed by the perception of English Bible versions accepted by the Protestant denominations of the New World. Attached to the main strains of the Reformation taken place in England these religious movements manifested themselves through the primary appeal to the Scripture translations which were made at the Elizabethan stage of the Church Reform and realized the Renaissance intentions of forming the personal horizons of comprehension of universal Truth

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uncovered by the Revelation. Anticipated by the first attempts of transmitting God's Word into English embodied in John Wycliffe's Bible (1384) and William Tindale's Bible (1536) and systematized in the Great Bible (1539 – 1541) the Scripture renderings performed during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558 – 1603) and known as the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Bishops' Bible (1568) marked by their correlation the diapason of the Reformers' views revealed in England contributing in such a way into the search for the balance achieved in the King James' Bible (1611) recognized as *the most influential version of the most influential book in the world* both by the Anglican Communion and non-Anglican branches of Protestantism.

Elizabethan translations of God-Breathed Book were brought to North America in the seventeenth century and subdivided the areas of communicating the created persons with Creator. Gary De Mar, President of American Vision and Honorary Member of the 1599 Geneva Bible Advisory Board, underlines: “In 1620 the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth with their Bibles and a conviction derived from those Bibles of establishing a new nation. The Bible was not the King James Version. When James I became king of England in 1603, there were two translations of the Bible in use; the Geneva Bible was the most popular, and the Bishops' Bible was used for reading in churches...In the end, the Geneva Bible was replaced by the King James Version, but not before it helped to settle America” [15]. Thus, having spread on North American continent the Scripture version appeared in Geneva in 1560 became the cornerstone of the self-definition of the human personality based upon his/her communion with God in the Protestant understanding of their relationship. W. H. Noah and D. L. Brown state: “In fact, the Geneva Bible was the principal English Bible initially brought to American soil, making it the Bible that shaped early American life and impacted Colonial culture more than any other... it is certain the Geneva Bible became the spiritual foundation for the future United States of America...The Geneva Bible helped to form the Christian culture in the English-speaking colonies of the New World that would later become America.” [16] M. Simms emphasizes the initial preference of the Geneva Bible in the region of locating Boston university founded two hundred years later and becoming the cradle of American personalism: “Being a Puritan Bible, the Geneva would be used throughout the early colonies wherever English-speaking Puritans were found. New England used it extensively...” [17].

The Bishops' translation of God-Breathed Book is supposed to be used in the first English church service held on the soil of America. According to the explanation given by W. H. Noah and D. L. Brown it was probably conducted “by a chaplain to Sir Francis



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Drake when he put ashore briefly in California in 1579” [16]. But being in official use on North American continent until its supersession by the King James' Bible the Scripture renderings produced under the authority of the established Church of England in 1568 could not compete with the Geneva version in expanding all over the New World.

Even due to so brief overview of scientific retrospectives of the contribution to evangelizing America made by the Bible translations of the age of Elizabeth it should be recognized that the research for the way of American personalist thought to the theistic basis of the personality presupposes reflecting the forms of ultimate communication realized in these versions of God-Breathed Book.

The reception of communicative experience and potential acquired by translating the Scripture in the era of Elizabeth I will encourage the aspiration for reuniting spirituality and rationality in the social-humanitarian space of contemporaneity self-reflected as “the post-secular age” [9]. Actualizing at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this intention “testifies to the awareness ... of the inseparability of intellectual source from its spiritual origins, opened by Christianity, but lost in the course of the secularization of knowledge” [12]. The designation of such a prospect of post-secular humanitarian studies does not demonstrate the exhaustion of resources of rational consciousness: “The voluntary communion of the person with God, the involvement of his mind into the conciliar mind of the Church negates neither human mind nor manifestations of personal life, but on the contrary, it is their triumph. It is through the incarnation of Christ, “Thy birth, O Christ our God, shined upon the world the light of wisdom” [18]. Thus to reveal those ways of transmission of God's Word in human languages that were paved by English translators of God-Breathed Book in the last third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the analysis of the Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible should be performed on the base of realizing the impossibility of recognition of sense and origins of the personality without the synergy of divine and human sources.

The earlier Elizabethan Scripture translation was made by the Reformers who had to flee from England to Geneva after Mary Tudor's Accession to the English throne taken place in 1553 and giving the start of Catholic reaction in the country. One of these Genevan refugees, William Whittingham, completed his rendering of the New Testament in 1557 which was printed by Conrad Badius [19] in the same year. Two years later the group of Marian exiles including such Protestant scholars as Christopher Goodman, John Pullain, Thomas Sampson, Miles Coverdale and William Whittingham himself finished their version of the Old Testament.



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Thus the early years of Elizabeth's reign were marked by the publication of the English Scripture translation performed in Geneva in 1560 and accepted as “the Bible for Puritans” in Elizabethan England. Produced originally in continental Europe and only in quarto size this rendering of the Scripture was shipped in the whole issue to the British Isles where it became known as the Geneva Bible.

In 1561 this version was printed in England; a patent of monopoly was given to James Bodleigh and in 1576 it was transferred to Christopher Barker, in whose family the right of printing this Scripture translation remained for upwards of a century [19]. According to the figures given by D. V. Wallace and E. H. Plumptre, the experts on the history of rendering the Bible into English, during the almost semi-centennial reign of Queen Elizabeth I nearly 100 [20] (not less than 80 [19]) editions of Genevan translators' work were published. Even such approximate rating data of Elizabethan publications of the Geneva version proves that it was the most popular rendering of the Scripture in England in the late sixteenth – early seventeenth centuries. This popularity is affirmed by the facts of common knowledge that (1) the Geneva Bible was the first English translation of God-Breathed Book to be brought to America and (2) it was used by William Shakespeare.

The prevalence of this rendering of the Scripture in the age of Elizabeth I might be defined by the following factors:

- the size of its volume (a small quarto) was appropriate for every-day home usage;
- it was the first English version of the Bible “which laid aside the obsolescent black letter, and appeared in Roman type” in the majority of its editions; [19]
- this translation of the Scripture introduced the standard (generally accepted nowadays) division into verses following both the tradition of ancient origin revealed in Masoretic versions of the Old Testament and the innovation performed by the famous French printer and classical scholar of the sixteenth century Robert Estienne (known as Robertus Stephanus) in his fourth edition of the New Testament (in the Latin translation of Erasmus) made in 1551.

But the acceptance of the Geneva Bible in the Elizabethan era had the limits determined by the confessional divergences between the translators involved in the work over it and their contemporaries concerned with the Reformation in England. As E. H. Plumptre underlines, this rendering of the Scripture “was accordingly the version specially adopted by the great Puritan party through the whole reign of Elizabeth, and far into that of James” [19]. The Puritan's character of the Bible translation made by the

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exiled English Reformers was revealed in the extensive margin notes which added about one third the length of the Scripture text itself (approximately 300 000 words). Inspired by John Calvin, the leader of the Swiss Reformation (and by coincidence William Whittingham's brother-in-law) these commentaries reflected the process of the authors' adoption of the Calvinistic ideas which reinforced the foundations of Puritanism. But the radical requirement for purifying the Church of England was not shared by all the Reformed Protestants of the Elizabethan age. Accordingly the metatext of the Geneva Bible formed by the translators became the main obstacle for its general recognition by the Englishmen in the late sixteenth – early seventeenth centuries. Moreover, as F. G. Kenyon points out in his analytical review of rendering the Scripture into English, this version “could hardly be expected to find favor, namely, among the leaders of the Church of England. Elizabeth herself was not too well disposed towards the Puritans, and the bishops in general belonged to the less extreme party in the church” [21].

Thus, the archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, took on the task of coming up with an alternative to the Geneva Bible. He proposed to revive “the old project of a translation to be produced by the bishops” [21]. E. H. Plumptre describes the process of its realization in such a way: “Great preparations were made...The bishops..., eight in number, together with some deans and professors, brought out the fruit of their labors in a magnificent folio” [19]. It appeared in 1568 and was called the Bishops' Bible. The second edition of this Scripture version was published in 1569 and included a considerable number of alterations which “were made, partly, it appears, as the result of the criticisms of Giles Laurence, professor of Greek at Oxford” [21]. In 1572 the third (and the last) edition of the Bishops' Bible appeared, “of importance chiefly in the New Testament, and in some cases reverting to the first edition of 1568” [21]. The later Elizabethan Scripture version was introduced in official use; according to the characteristic given by F. F. Bruce, one of the most respected Biblical scholars of the twentieth century, during the reign of the Virgin Queen “the Bible of the liturgy would be the Bishops' Bible which was utilized in the Common Book of Prayer” [22]. But this rendering of the Scripture could not attain the popularity and influence of the Geneva Bible. E. H. Plumptre has a reason to state: “Of all the English versions, the Bishops' Bible had probably the least success. It did not command the respect of scholars, and its size and cost were far from meeting the wants of the people. Its circulation appears to have been practically limited to the churches which were ordered to be supplied with it” [19].

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Thus the intention “to have diversity of translations and readings” (Matthew Parker, the archbishop of Canterbury) did not express the motives of creative activity realized in renderings of the Scripture performed at the climax of the Renaissance in England. The coexistence of The Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible in “the golden age” of the national history denoted the tension between the groups of the English Protestants formed in that period. Characterizing the historical context of these versions Jr. Brown reasonably sums up: “The low church Separatists championed the Geneva Bible. Conversely, the high church Anglicans promoted the Bishop’s Bible” [23].

Both versions of God-Breathed Book appeared in the era of Elizabeth realized “word-by-word” model of translation in the course of rendering into English the *topoi* defining the personal being in the Greek original of the New Testament. Simultaneously The Geneva Bible and the Bishops' Bible differed in transforming the Scripture textual organization. The former of these versions didn't exhaust its innovation by introducing the first modern verse divisions, but included “the bracketed” commentaries forming the deliberate perception of the Biblical testimonies. The latter of Elizabethan translations of God Breathed Book was intended to unite two opposite principles of structuring the text: priority of edification presupposing the tendentiousness of interpreting the Scripture evidences and “diversity of translations and readings” demonstrated by combining the different versions of Psalms and attaching the initials of translators to the parts of the Bible rendering produced by them.

Reinforcing the rational aspect of perceiving the Biblical text all these means of providing the personal access to the living God's Word predicted the rationalistic restrictions of the scope of comprehending the supernatural Revelation and formed the premises of reducing the spiritual source of personality to personalized *ratio* in the classical conceptions of American personalism revealing its contradictions and clarifying the perspective of its further investigation.

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Taking into consideration the Biblical background of American personalism and its genetic connections with the denominations of Protestantism developed on the North American continent and the branching Protestant theology, the author focuses on both proper philosophical and theological reference points of this personalistic current of philosophizing in the historical-philosophical reconstruction of its genesis oriented towards the meta-ontological dimension of the personality.Â Generated to overcome the person's estrangement from his/her existence taking its roots (due to the thinker's Biblical allusions) in the fall and Personalism is thus in the tradition of the cogito, ergo sum (âœœI think, therefore I amâœœ) of Renâœ© Descartes in holding that, in the subjective flow of lived-through experience, one makes more direct soundings of the real than in anything arriving through the tortuous paths of perceptual processes. The word person comes from the Latin persona, which referred to the mask worn by an actor and thus to his role. Eventually, it came to mean the dignity of a man among men. The person is thus supreme both in reality (as substance) and in value (as dignity). There are various kinds of personalism.Â Get exclusive access to content from our 1768 First Edition with your subscription. Subscribe today.

Personalism has been strongly represented in France, usually under the name of spiritualism . American Individualism was founded on several elements: One element that has to do with American Individualism is composed of two separate perspectives: America as a âœœuniqueâœœ culture in itself and Americans as people who are âœœIndependent Individuals.âœ A second element could be the idea of Independent Individualism, which has to do with individuals and not society as a whole; A third element may include the Protestant Ethic, which was established by John Calvin, Martin Luther and practiced by the Pilgrims who arrived in the New World seeking religious freedom; Transcendentalism, a philosophical PERSONALISM "Personalism" is a philosophical perspective or system for which person is the ontological ultimate and for which personality is thus the fundamental explanatory principle. Explicitly developed in the twentieth century, personalism in its historical antecedents and its dominant themes has close affiliations with and affinities to other (mainly idealist) systems that are not strictly personalist.Â In general, personalism has been decisively influenced by both the Greek metaphysical and the biblical religious motifs of the dominant Western theological tradition. With the notable exception of J. M. E. McTaggart's atheistic personalism, personalism in virtually all its forms has been integrally connected with theism.